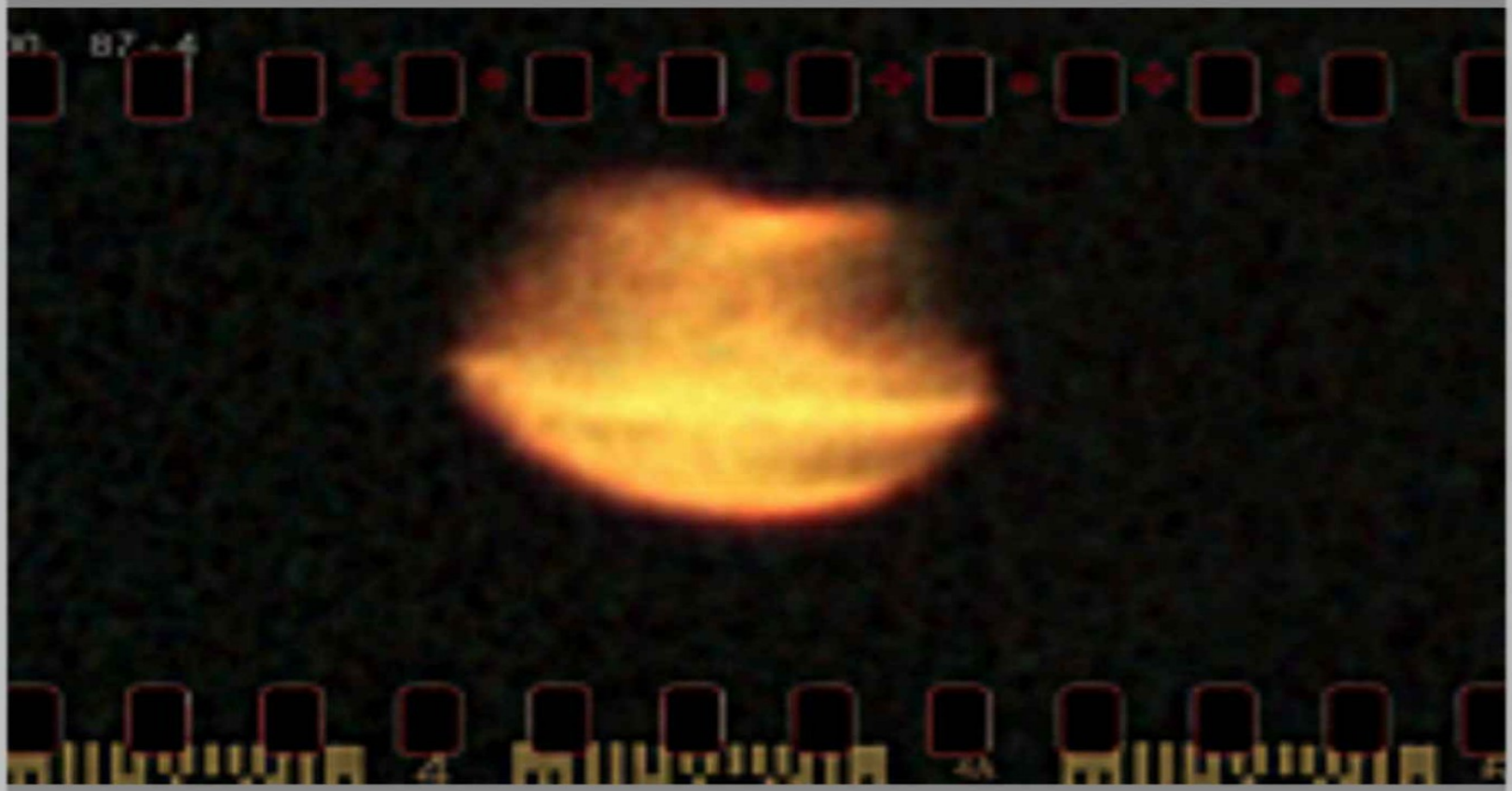
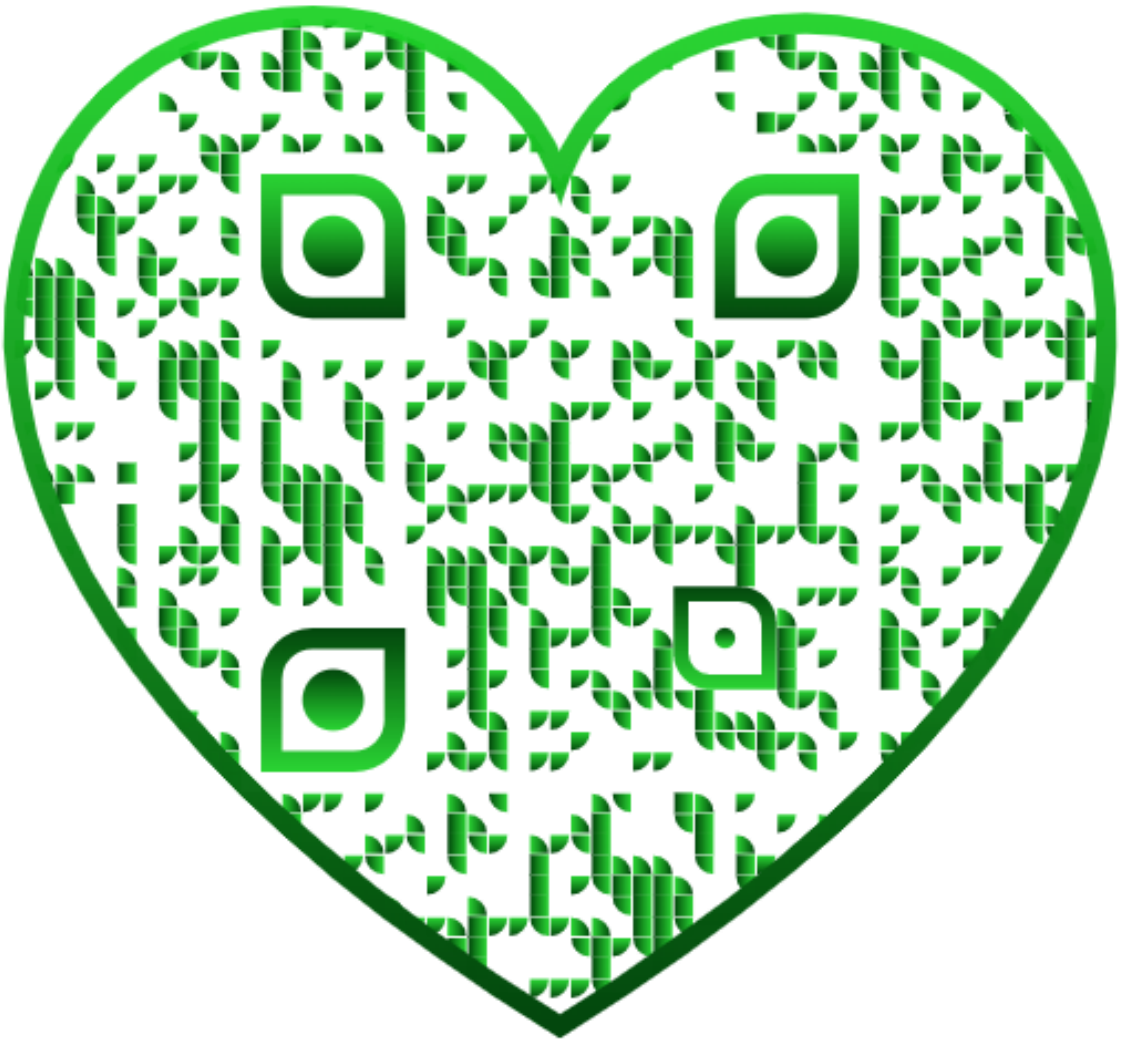
QUENTIN FOGARTY



Let's Hope They're Friendly

The Kaikoura UFOs. First verified film encounter with Unidentified Flying Objects.



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The Kaikoura UFOs
Let's Hope They're Friendly

Quentin Fogarty

With a foreword by Professor J Allen Hynek, director of the Center for UFO Studies

First published in 1982. This ebook edition was published in February 2014.
It contains one additional chapter, *Chapter 20: Reflections 2014*, in which the author speculates on the origin of some of the objects observed and filmed off New Zealand's Kaikoura Coast. People's titles are described as they were at the time of the original publication.

This book is dedicated to my family and to my many friends who stood by me when the going got rough, especially Steve Levitt and Andrew Flannigan.

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The Author

Quentin Fogarty is a respected journalist, film-maker and communications specialist who lives in Victoria, Australia.

On 31 December 1978, he was involved in a UFO encounter off the Kaikoura Coast on the South Island of New Zealand.

The story made headlines around the world and continues to generate interest among UFO proponents and sceptics. In 2008, NBC's Dateline program rated the Kaikoura sightings as one of the top 10 UFO events of all time.

Fogarty remains convinced that no satisfactory, mundane explanation has yet been advanced to explain the sightings.

Let's Hope They're Friendly is the remarkable story behind the worlds's first verified film encounter with Unidentified Flying Objects.

"The data could indicate that intelligence was involved (OI — Other Intelligence). For example, the event when flying south when the radar target 'doubled in size' and stayed that way while you looked out the window and saw a light apparently traveling with the airplane, and the associated radar targets before and after — no natural phenomenon could account for this and there were no other aircraft, hence could be (probably is) evidence of OI."

Dr Bruce Maccabee, PH.D, September 2013

NOTE: Colour images from the original UFO film, such as the Lazy Eight image above — as well as other material pertaining to the Kaikoura sightings — can be viewed at www.kaikouraufos.com

Preface

Early on the morning of 31 December 1978, a number of extraordinary events took place off the New Zealand coast. An Argosy freight aircraft, carrying a television film crew, became involved in a series of UFO sightings that were to make headlines around the world. What made this case so special was the fact that several of the bright objects were filmed and a number were also tracked on radar.

Those on board the aircraft that morning were Quentin Fogarty, a journalist employed by a Melbourne television station, Channel O (since renamed Channel 10); David Crockett, a freelance cameraman, and his wife, Ngaire, a freelance sound-recordist, both from Wellington, New Zealand; Dennis Grant, a New Zealand television journalist, and the flight crew, Captain Bill Startup and First Officer Bob Guard, both from Blenheim, New Zealand.

Three months after that flight, at a press conference in New York City on 26 March 1979, a group of American scientists stated that the light sources captured on film that December morning could not be explained by conventional means. Those at the press conference included Fogarty; Dr Bruce Maccabee, the scientist who headed the inquiry into the case; Professor J. Allen Hynek, director of the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS); and John Acuff, the former president of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP).

Dr Maccabee, an optical physicist specialising in laser technology, then worked as a civilian scientist for the United States Navy's Surface Weapons Center at White Oak, Maryland. He was also a consultant to NICAP and it was in this capacity that he carried out his investigation into the New Zealand sightings.

Maccabee spent three months on the case before releasing his findings and he travelled to Australia and New Zealand to interview all the witnesses. In addition, he subjected the original film to an exhaustive study and carried out computer-enhancement analysis on copies of the film. He then referred his findings to a further 20 scientists and experts in the fields of optics, physics and radar and they agreed that the light sources could not be explained by any known means.

NICAP, which over a period of 22 years had investigated 20,000 reported UFO sightings, was for the first time prepared to endorse a film as showing a genuine unidentified flying object.

Foreword

Professor J. Allen Hynek

Professor Emeritus of Astronomy

Northwestern University

Midst the continual flow of UFO reports from all over the world, there occasionally occur a few which, in importance, rise like mountain peaks above the surrounding terrain. The New Zealand sightings of December 1978 are an outstanding example of those relatively few UFO sightings that not only capture worldwide public attention but, what is of much greater significance, are of scientific interest and value.

Science demands that whenever possible data be repeatable and instrumentally recorded. However, tornadoes, earthquakes, and a host of other phenomena are examples of events which cannot be brought into the laboratory at will and repeated at the pleasure of the scientist. The UFO phenomenon is one of these, but fortunately it is amenable to instrumental recording when, by happy circumstance, such instrumentation is at hand. This, however, is rare indeed, for no one can predict a UFO event which, like a very bright meteor, “just happens.” Lying in wait for a UFO to manifest in a given spot has a very low probability of success.

Quentin Fogarty describes vividly the unique circumstances which led to the unprecedented recording on movie film and on radar screens of a remarkable visual display of lights whose brightness and antics have to date found no viable rational explanation, despite the frantic efforts of the scoffers to conjure them up. Indeed, the lengths to which such have gone in efforts at explanation provide spritely comedy relief to this otherwise serious recital of astounding UFO events. According to these “explainers”, the lights were due to: flocks of mutton birds heading inland to mate, moonlight reflecting off cabbage patches, Venus when below the horizon, Jupiter in the wrong part of the sky, meteors which hadn’t quite burned up in the atmosphere, Japanese squid boats that were far out to sea ...!

In my long association with the UFO subject, which reaches back well over 30 years, one outstanding fact has impressed me: the UFO experience, whatever its cause, is above all a human adventure. It is actually a frightfully human sort of thing, pulling out many of the stops on the keyboard of human emotions and reactions: awe, fear, wonder, the sense of the presence of an unknown world, of beauty and spectacle, and of extreme puzzlement. Witnesses have reported standing transfixed as the UFO event unfolded before them, not knowing whether to stay, but often unable to run, sometimes reporting as one airman did to me, that it seemed as though he were "looking into another world." The UFO experience tests one's sense of reality and introduces one to an awareness that our smug concepts of everyday reality may have to be somewhat altered, that we may have to accept that there are indeed "more things in heaven and earth" than are dreamt of in our philosophies.

Fogarty has presented the encounter of the crew of the Argosy aircraft, and his personal involvement in it, as an adventure story and as a very human experience; not only the event itself but its reception by friends, the public, the press, and by the government and science. He has done this without sacrificing the scientific aspects of this important case. Although he views these through the eyes of a journalist, he faithfully presents the findings and opinions of the scientists and technicians whose experience was brought to bear in these investigations. He is indebted, in particular, to Dr Bruce Maccabee, whose photometric studies of the luminous phenomena captured on movie film have been the *bête noire* of those who have tried to find a prosaic explanation for the sightings.

"Let's Hope They're Friendly" is, in short, a mystery story involving humans and?, but how – as pawns, as objects of observations, or as inadvertent bystanders? It differs from the traditional mystery story in that we can't turn to the last pages for its solution — those are still missing unfortunately.

A UFO event is a human experience in another way. One would hardly expect that serious rivalries and legal difficulties would arise in a UFO investigation, or that the spectre of the dollar sign would loom so large as to affect one's physical and mental welfare. Unfortunately it can – and did. And vilification by both the public and by scientists can be a part of this human experience too. Imagine a serious investigator being accused of being in

league with the devil and consorting with demons on one hand, and yet on the other, the target of a barrage of biblical quotations purporting to prove that UFOs foretell the Second Coming! The scientists' reactions were hardly any better, and scientific irresponsibility rose to dizzying heights as one hypothesis after another was advanced without recourse to first-hand field investigations.

A practiced UFO investigator could have warned Fogarty that such vilifications were sure to follow once he publicly championed UFO investigation. He received a "crash course" in the vagaries of human nature when it faces the unknown. He writes, "Gradually my interest in the subject began to undergo a metamorphosis. I was no longer concerned whether UFOs were space travellers, time travellers, psychic phenomena, God and his angelic hosts, or Satan and his demonic hordes. Rather, I had become fascinated by the lengths to which some people were prepared to go to argue away the facts surrounding the phenomenon."

Now, finally, I might venture a word about my own peripheral involvement in this New Zealand story. As the story broke around the world I was asked by a national TV network to comment on the film "live" as it was being shown to the TV audience. I remarked as I viewed it that it was perhaps the best UFO film I had seen so far, but that final judgment must await technical analysis. Dr Maccabee provided that analysis and amply substantiated my preliminary statement.

A few days later I was asked once again to come to the TV studio, this time to comment on a new UFO movie film from New Zealand, taken by a rival TV station apparently anxious to "get into the act." They had sent a film crew to what they felt was a likely spot on the New Zealand seacoast near the mouth of the Clarence River. And they did get some spectacular pictures – of Venus! This was painfully apparent to me as I watched the film and simultaneously interrogated the photographer sitting in the New Zealand TV studio (oh the magic of the satellites!)

Their crew had held a vigil on the seashore, cameras ready, and, lo and behold, at 3 am (the precise time of the rising of Venus that day) the lookout, gazing at the eastern horizon saw a distorted image of Venus rising through the thick atmosphere, gave the UFO alert and the movie camera began rolling. Venus did precisely what it could be expected to do – changed colour

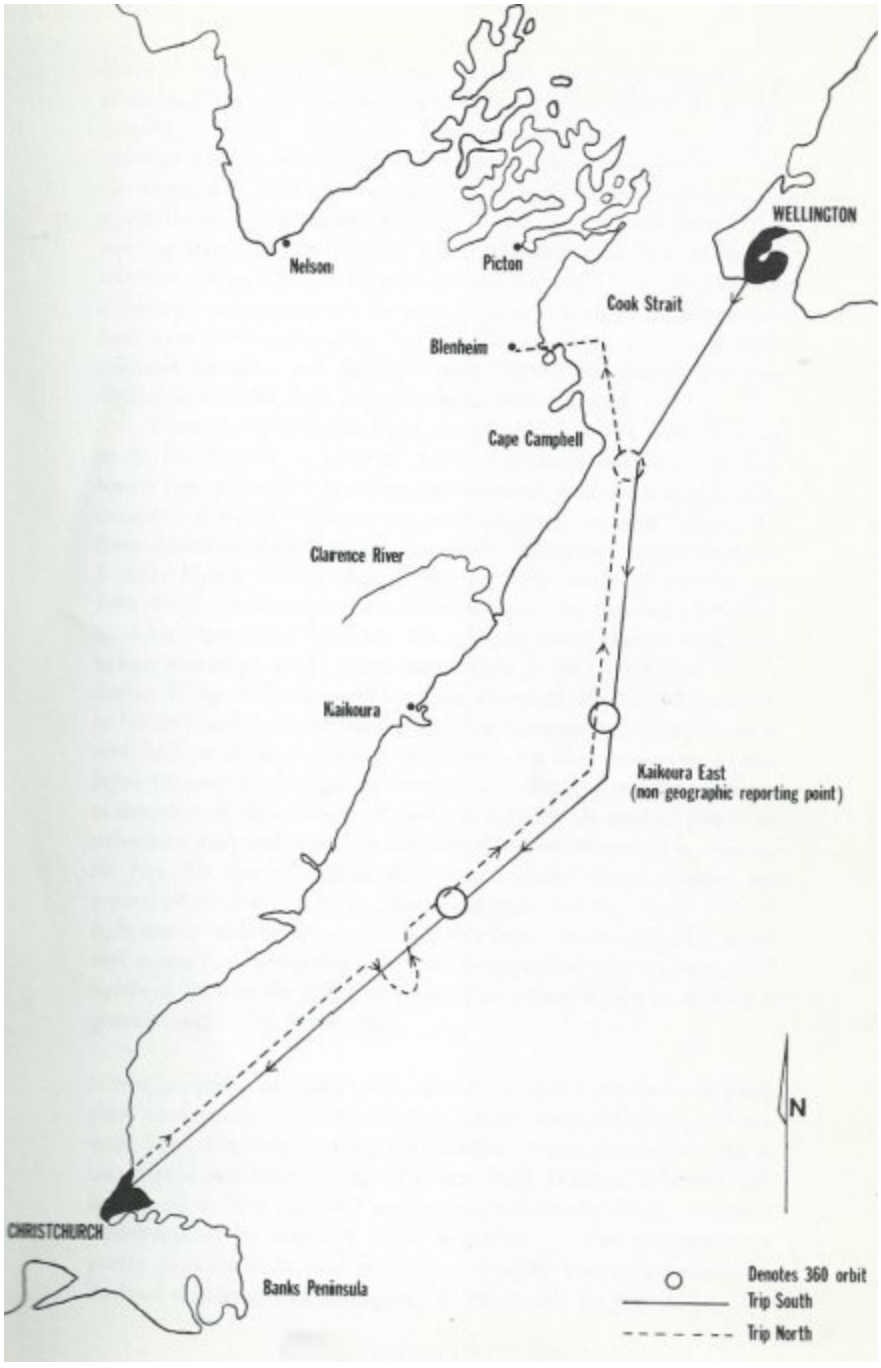
as it rose slantwise to the north-east. An embarrassing moment! I therefore posed a question which I hoped would be properly interpreted by the alert listener and which would cause the least embarrassment to the obviously sincere photographer and his associates: “Did you see Venus at the same time as you were photographing the UFO?” The negative answer rested the case.

The same solution could not be given for the film described in this book for the simple but devastating reason that Venus had not yet risen when the photos were taken!

The New Zealand UFO events described on the following pages are, of course, important in themselves as scientific evidence, even if they stood alone, but they have another dimension of importance: they illustrate graphically, and for the record, what hundreds of other witnesses from over the world have described but were not fortunate enough to have photographed. I have personally listened to accounts by a great number of people whose descriptions match in general what the New Zealand film shows, which film, of course, was supported by radar and visual observations.

The reality of Nocturnal Lights, those UFOs of the night sky whose behavior remains unexplained, seems to be well established.

Approximate path of aircraft



Most of the sightings occurred along the north-eastern stretch of the South Island, an area known as the Kaikoura Coast. The main sighting took place just north of Christchurch as the aircraft was on

its return journey to Blenheim.

Introduction

It was a Saturday, 24 April 1979, almost a month after the New York press conference. I was attending to some household chores and my wife Sue was busy bathing the children, when the phone rang at our Melbourne home. The caller was John Wilson, a former colleague on a New Zealand newspaper, the *Sunday Press*, a journal renowned for its beat-ups, headline-catching stories and photos of pretty girls. Wilson told me he was writing a story on the New Zealand sightings and there were a few points he wanted to clear up. I told him to fire away. After some preliminary small talk, he hit me with a bombshell.

"Is it true," he asked, "that you have been in America for treatment at a mental asylum?" I was incredulous.

"Where on earth did you hear that?"

"There was a report on radio," he replied.

I quickly explained that I had not been receiving treatment at a mental asylum but had travelled to the United States as a guest of the American Broadcasting Company to appear on their Good Morning America program, and also to be present at the press conference. I could sense that Wilson was a little disappointed with such a mundane response and he rocked me back on my heels again.

"Is it true that you've been visited by the Men In Black (the legendary standover men of ufology)?" Again I had to disappoint him.

"No, John," I said, "they haven't paid me a call."

I put down the phone, amazed that in spite of the press conference and its attendant publicity the rumours were still rife. I had believed, naively as it turned out, that the press conference would quash the snide asides, the rumours and the lies that had dogged my tracks since I brought my incredible story to the world. But the undercurrent of scepticism and disbelief was to continue and the rumours, especially those relating to my alleged madness, persisted. For example, on 6 April 1980, my wife boarded a taxi outside the Melbourne city offices of the Australian Broadcasting Commission where she was working as a journalist. She asked the driver to take her across town to

the commission's television studios where she was to pick up a film crew to complete an assignment for that evening's news program. She settled back for the short ride, lost in her thoughts. But the driver wanted to talk about television news in general and one reporter in particular. That reporter, Leonard Lee, had formerly worked for Channel O and soon after the New Zealand sightings he had taken the UFO film to the US to place it in the hands of NICAP. The driver told my wife he had driven Lee and the film to Melbourne airport. Sue listened as the driver related his thoughts about UFOs and Lee's involvement in the story. It was apparent he was under the impression that it was Lee's story, so Sue decided to set him straight.

"Actually," she said, "it was my husband's story."

"How is he now?" enquired the driver.

"Fine, thanks," replied my wife, wondering what was coming next. She did not have long to wait.

"Didn't he go mad?" asked the driver calmly.

These were just two of the incidents that sorely tried my patience in the first few months following the sightings. This book is my attempt to set the record straight and, hopefully, to lay to rest some of the more outlandish rumours and wild stories. The aftermath of the 31 December sightings was traumatic not only for my family and me but for all of those involved in those mysterious events. Friendships fell apart, marriages suffered, and people's hopes and aspirations took a tumble. This is not simply a story about UFOs; it is also a very human account of what happened to a group of ordinary people who found themselves caught up in an extraordinary situation.

Chapter 1: Christmas 1978

Just before midnight on 20 December 1978, a planeload of weary passengers touched down at Auckland International Airport after a flight from Australia. The Air New Zealand DC10 was about four hours behind schedule due to industrial trouble at Melbourne airport. Among the bleary-eyed passengers who made their way off the aircraft and through the concourse to the customs and immigration desks were myself, my wife Sue, and our two children, Daniel, then aged four, and Benjamin, two. We were at the start of a long-awaited holiday, hoping that it would be a nostalgic three weeks in the country we had left fifteen months earlier for a new life in Australia. Both Sue and I had our fingers crossed that the delay in Melbourne was only an isolated incident and that the rest of our holiday would go smoothly.

Why is it that at almost every airport around the world there are never enough people on duty to process incoming passengers? That particular night in Auckland was no exception. There were only three immigration officers to cope with a full complement of passengers from a DC10 – well over 200 people – and the lateness of the hour and the four-hour delay made standing in a line with two tired children very trying. But immigration was only the first frustration. Next came the wait as our baggage found its way through the bowels of the airport to the claim area. Fortunately, the customs officer was friendly and let us through without checking our suitcases. We headed for the car-hire offices in the terminal foyer. It was now 21 December.

About the same time, 560 kilometres south, two air traffic controllers were huddled over their radar screens in a darkened room at the Wellington air traffic control centre. John Cordy and Andy Herd were picking up mysterious returns in an area where there should not have been any airborne activity. At this stage they had no idea that they would soon become embroiled in a series of events that would eventually baffle scientists around the world. Those events would also involve me, but, like John and Andy, I was blissfully unaware of the drama ahead.

Just across Cook Strait from Wellington, in the north-east corner of the South

Island, lies Blenheim, a quiet country town, with a population of 17,500 serving the prosperous farming and fruit-growing province of Marlborough. On the western outskirts of the town is Woodbourne aerodrome, a Royal New Zealand Air Force base and the civilian airport for Blenheim and the surrounding district. It is also the home base for Safe Air Limited, the country's major airfreight company that operates a fleet of Bristol Freighters and Hawker Siddeley Argosy aircraft. Just before midnight on 20 December, Warrant Officer Ian Uffindell was on a routine security patrol of the aerodrome when he noticed a number of bright lights in the sky to the south-east, in the direction of Cape Campbell on the Kaikoura coast. At first he thought they were the landing lights of a Bristol Freighter on its approach to the airport, but after watching the lights for several minutes he realised they were not getting any closer. Intrigued, he decided to check with the control tower.

Flight Service Officer Bill Frame was on duty in the tower when Uffindell walked in and pointed out the lights. Frame, who was waiting for the arrival of a number of Safe Air flights, was a little taken aback because he knew there were not supposed to be any aircraft in the area at the time. It did not take the two men very long to realise the lights, apparently hovering above the coast, were not the landing lights of a conventional aircraft. Initially the men saw three lights – a large, bright white light and two smaller, dimmer lights. Frame decided it was time to find out more about the mysterious aerial display and he called up John Cordy at the Wellington air traffic control centre. Frame asked Cordy if he had any returns in the vicinity of Cape Campbell. Cordy confirmed that he and Herd were picking up returns in the area, although the targets appeared to be further south than the visual sightings. An incredible sequence of events began to unfold.

Meanwhile, back in Auckland, the Fogartys were driving through dark, wet city streets to their waterfront motel.

Above the north-east coast of the South Island, the strange aerial activity was continuing. In the control tower at Woodbourne, Bill Frame and Ian Uffindell watched and wondered. The call to Wellington radar, which had confirmed radar targets in the general area of the lights, had been exciting and a little disturbing. What on earth was out there? The lights were apparently giving off aircraft-like returns but they were not behaving like conventional aircraft.

Also, if they had been conventional aircraft, then the pilots should have filed flight plans as required by New Zealand aviation law. But no such plans had been lodged.

The two men watched the aerial display for more than an hour and during that time the lights moved up and down the coast, sometimes stopping and then moving off again. The two dimmer lights were far more active than the larger light and appeared to move, and stop, in unison. Occasionally beams of light shone down from the three objects, always at an angle of about 45 degrees. It was almost as if the lights were searching for something. At the same time, the police at Blenheim were receiving calls from people who reported seeing bright lights in the sky in the direction of the Kaikoura coast.

Throughout the sightings, the controllers and Frame maintained telephone contact and this led to one of the most intriguing aspects of the case. On several occasions the movement of the lights, as described by Frame over the phone, corresponded exactly with the movement of the objects on radar – they moved in the same direction, at the same time. Not surprisingly, the controllers were impressed, in spite of the fact that the targets were apparently 25 to 35 nautical miles (all references to miles in this book are nautical miles) to the south of the area where Frame and Uffindell placed the airborne lights. This discrepancy has never been satisfactorily explained and sceptics argue, with some justification, that because of the distance the lights could not have been responsible for the radar targets. At the same time, however, the apparent correlation of movements convinced the controllers that there was some relationship between the returns and the lights sighted off the Kaikoura coast.

Cordy and Herd were excited but also frustrated. The only thing they were certain of was that the targets corresponded with the movement of a number of strange, airborne lights. They had absolutely no idea what the lights were. And they had another major puzzle on their hands. At 12.50 am, about 50 minutes after they first began to pick up returns off the Kaikoura coast, they noticed a target about 30 miles off the coast. The target, which was giving a return comparable to a large passenger aircraft, tracked south-east from Wellington at a speed of 120 knots to a point about 60 miles east of the Clarence River mouth. Then, much to the astonishment of Cordy and Herd, the object stopped but continued to appear on radar. That should not have

happened since one of the sets in use at Wellington had been programmed not to pick up stationary objects. But here was a target that had been tracked for 30 miles, at a speed of 120 knots, apparently stationary and airborne. And what is more, it stayed in this position for about 45 minutes before moving off and performing another couple of extraordinary manoeuvres.

I was to discover later that there were two possible explanations for its continued presence on radar while it was stationary – the object was either spinning, or moving up and down in the same spot. This particular object was to remain on radar for almost three hours and was to play a central role in the morning's events.

Back in Auckland, we had reached our motel and were trying to sleep in the muggy conditions. Sue and I were both excited about being back in New Zealand and were keen to see our families again to show off our two little boys. Our initial plan was to drive to the city of Hamilton, just south of Auckland, to spend two days with my sister and her family. Then we intended to fly to Wellington to spend Christmas with Sue's parents on their farm on the outskirts of Martinborough, a sleepy little town just north of Wellington. On 30 December we were booked to fly to Christchurch in the South Island where we had arranged to stay with some old friends, Dennis and Robyn Grant, and also to spend some time visiting my mother.

As I lay in the motel room, dozing fitfully and thinking about our holiday plans, two Safe Air pilots were going through their pre-flight checklist on the tarmac at Woodbourne aerodrome.

It was just after one o'clock. Argosy SAE (Sierra Alpha Echo) was taxiing slowly towards its take-off area. In command was Captain John Randle, 45, a pilot with 14,500 hours flying time to his credit. His co-pilot was First Officer Keith Heine, aged 32. Their planned route that morning would take them first to Christchurch and then back up the South Island, across Cook Strait and on to their final destination, Auckland. At 1.10 am, Sierra Alpha Echo took off and began climbing to its cruising altitude.

Back at the Wellington air traffic control centre, Cordy and Herd realised they now had a chance, albeit a slim one, to identify their mysterious returns. They called up Randle and Heine and asked if they could keep a lookout for the main target, still stationary 60 miles off the Kaikoura coast, and the

smaller targets inshore. The Argosy passed over Cape Campbell and headed towards Kaikoura East, a non-geographic reporting point directly east of the township of Kaikoura. Once the aircraft had reached its cruising altitude the crew began their search. The first lights the crew noticed were in Cook Strait, about 15 to 20 miles southwest of the entrance to Wellington harbour. Randle thought the lights looked like a large tanker, with a pilot boat approaching to guide it through the heads. At this time, the stationary object was still holding its position about 60 miles south-east of the aircraft. But as the Argosy headed down the coast, something very strange occurred. The object began to move towards the aircraft's track. The controllers at Wellington plotted its course for about 20 miles at a speed of 120 knots. The object then stopped about 20 miles east of the Argosy's track and stayed there as the aircraft continued south.

About the same time, the crew saw a number of white lights, similar to car headlights, close to shore, in positions that coincided with returns being picked up by Wellington radar. The viewing conditions were difficult. It was an extremely dark night and the lights were seen against a backdrop of dark, high mountains. The lights were moving about randomly, over a considerable distance, and occasionally they would shine downwards, in much the same manner as the shafts of light observed by Frame and Uffindell from the Woodbourne control tower. To Randle, the beams were more like floodlights than searchlights and there were times when they lit up surface features, either land or cloud banks. Initially the crew thought they might be looking at cars driving along the coastal road, but the speed and movement of the lights, and their brightness, convinced them otherwise. Randle then considered that the lights might be helicopters engaged in an exercise of some sort. "They were very much like helicopters, carrying brilliant lights, moving around at altitudes of between 500 and 1000 feet," he said later. But he was puzzled. If they were helicopters, what were they doing in such a desolate area at that time of the morning? Maybe, he thought, they were helicopters from a Russian whaling fleet, or military craft engaged in a night-time exercise. (See footnote).*

As the men watched the visual display to the southwest of their aircraft, there was a sudden flash of light. Randle, who placed the light at an altitude of about 500 feet, was struck by its brilliance. The light was visible for only a

few seconds but during that time Randle clearly saw it light up the ground on a property he was familiar with, owned by a family named Critcheley. At the time the aircraft was about 30 miles from the light source and Randle estimated its strength at about 3000 watts.

The crew also picked up a number of returns on their weather radar that may have been ships. According to Randle, several of the returns suggested craft of "over 500 tons." One of these returns was plotted off Clarence and two were observed further south, about 30 miles north of Motunau Island. Although the returns were too big for single fishing boats, Randle thought they might be larger, Russian-type whaling/fishing vessels, or Japanese or Korean fishing boats tied up to larger ships. But there was one puzzling factor. The targets were close to shore, in shallow, dangerous waters. On a later daylight flight, Randle checked the coastline where the targets had been observed and he could see shoals, which confirmed his initial feeling that the waters were "decidedly unsafe" for shipping.

Meanwhile, back at Woodbourne, another Argosy, Sierra Alpha Foxtrot, was being readied for a freight run to Christchurch. The crew was Captain Vern Powell, whose flying career stretched back 36 years, and First Officer Ian Pirie. Although they did not know it at the time, they were soon to be involved in the strange happenings off the Kaikoura coast.

Captain Vern Powell.

After landing at Christchurch, SAE was refuelled and took off again at 3.10 am bound for Auckland. Normally the crew would have flown up the mountainous centre of the South Island, before crossing Cook Strait and

continuing on to Auckland, but because of what had happened on the downward leg, Randle and Heine decided to fly back up the coast for another look. As they climbed out of Christchurch and headed for their cruising altitude, Argosy SAF was taking off from Blenheim on its way to Christchurch. Soon after take-off, Wellington radar called up Powell and asked if he could keep a lookout for the strange returns. The controllers were particularly interested in that rogue return holding its stationary position east of Cape Campbell. That mystery object had captured the imaginations of Cordy and Herd. Powell was delighted with the request from Wellington. He believed UFOs were real and during his long flying career he had searched the skies hoping to see one.

The controllers watched as the aircraft crossed Cape Campbell and headed towards Kaikoura East. At this stage the object was still stationary, about 50 miles from the aircraft. Suddenly it began to move. The controllers plotted its course as it travelled west towards the Argosy's track and then came to a halt. (The object had made a similar move towards SAE about two hours earlier). Sierra Alpha Foxtrot was now at 7500 feet and climbing through cloud. Vern Powell was about to see his first UFO.

RADAR: Ten o'clock to you, range 30 miles, it is a large target. This one tracked down from Wellington ... we saw it first of all about 30 miles out from Wellington ... it tracked down to 60 miles and has remained stationary for about three-quarters of an hour and has now moved about 20 miles to the west.

Powell looked to his 10 o'clock position, and to his amazement, there was a bright glowing white light, tinged with red. It was exactly where Wellington radar said it should be.

PLANE: We have a bright red, glowing light out to our 10 o'clock position ... hard to say what range it is, but it's definitely airborne.

Naturally, Cordy and Herd back in the radar room were elated. What had been, until then, an unidentified and inexplicable target was now a reality. The messages between SAF and the controllers continued.

RADAR: The ones off the Clarence coast have disappeared from the radar at the moment.

PLANE: Roger.

RADAR: That one, the bright red one, has also faded from radar at this time.

PLANE: It's still there, it's very bright.

RADAR: We are very pleased you saw that one. We've been tracking that one since half-past midnight and were hoping that someone would see it. That is the most pronounced of them.

Although the flight crew were unable to estimate the size of the object, Powell put is position at 2000 to 3000 feet above the aircraft.

PLANE: It appears to be stationary at the moment, is that right?

RADAR: That is confirmed. It has been stationary there for about 45 minutes.

But the object did not stay stationary for much longer. Suddenly it began to move on a parallel track with the aircraft.

RADAR: That one on your left, I think you will find it is starting to move in the same direction as yourself. It would appear it has moved approximately four miles while we have been speaking.

PLANE: Yes. The light has just gone out.
RADAR: He has disappeared from the radar too.

But the target soon reappeared both visually and on radar and tracked the aircraft for about 12 miles before disappearing. About the same time an excited Andy Herd called up the Christchurch radar room.

HERD: Jackpot! The southbound Argosy has seen a big red thing ...

CHRISTCHURCH: ... my God ...

HERD: ... yes, about 10,000 feet, about 2000 feet above him. We can see it too, on radar.

Argosy SAE was now approaching Kaikoura and the crew could hear Powell and Pirie describing their encounters with the controllers at Wellington. The northbound Argosy was at an altitude of 13,000 feet and the crew continued to see lights off the coast that they could not relate to any known light sources. Viewing conditions were now much better. The sky was lighter and the crew could establish clearly that the lights were out to sea and not over the land.

The crew also continued to pick up returns on their weather radar and, as

was the case on the downward leg, Randle thought they might be fishing boats. But again, he could not understand why such large vessels would be so close to shore, in shallow, dangerous waters. Also, some of the targets reported by Wellington radar were observed travelling at speeds of up to 120-130 knots, too fast for a fishing boat, but within the capabilities of some helicopters. (See footnote.)*

As the Argosy neared Cape Campbell, five strong targets showing on Wellington radar suddenly faded and then reappeared behind the aircraft. At the same time, Wellington reported another target moving in from the east along the same track as the aircraft. The controllers asked the crew if they would take a look. Randle and Heine put the aircraft into a 180-degree turn and continued south for a short time. Randle saw a number of lights, similar to the displays see on the downward leg. The lights were moving about randomly and were beaming downwards. As he related the incident to Wellington, the controllers made the following entry into their official log: "At 0406, five strong radar returns seen in the Clarence area and SAE did an orbit and saw intermittent lights, with possible surface reflections, similar to an A/C (aircraft) at approx 500 ft: (the lights were) white in colour with a slight amber tint. They are NOT distress flares." The Argosy then completed a full 360-degree turn and headed back on track to Auckland.

It should be pointed out that there were some differences in the recollections of Randle and Heine as to the exact details of the radar and visual sightings. Also, Heine saw a number of objects that Randle did not recall seeing. On another occasion, Randle disagreed with his co-pilot's description of a visual sighting but he did not consider that "a valid observation, by a competent flight officer, should be censored by me, even when I disagree with his analysis, so we sent everything to ground for their radar to look for." There was also later confusion about some of the statements and descriptions attributed to the flight crew. Randle believes this was the result of two things: during radio communications with the radar controllers at Wellington, the crew were referred to as a single entity, rather than as two individuals, and this caused some problems in accurately sourcing material; and there was also a communications mix-up during the flight. "We got out of sequence with ground at one time in the switching between the two communications sets, and the two stations on each," said Randle.

The unusual events of the morning of 21 December were drawing to a close. The Argosy piloted by Randle and Heine was now over the North Island and heading for Auckland, and SAF, with Powell and Pirie on board, was approaching Christchurch. Suddenly a target appeared on SAF's weather radar. The crew watched intently and, on the next sweep, one second later, the return had moved one mile closer. The target was now just less 40 forty miles, coming straight for the aircraft at a speed that Powell later estimated at between 8000 and 10,000 miles per hour. Thirty-seven miles, 36 miles, 35 ... the crew looked ahead but could see nothing. Then, just as suddenly as it appeared, the target veered to the left of the aircraft and disappeared off radar. At the same time, Powell and Pirie saw a flashing light to the front of the aircraft, nothing more. Two slightly puzzled pilots put their aircraft down at Christchurch airport.

Back in Auckland dawn was breaking and Daniel and Benny, as little boys are wont to do, were up and about. Slowly Sue and I dragged ourselves out of our dreams and set about getting dressed and preparing breakfast. Before leaving for Hamilton we had decided to go into Auckland city to visit some former workmates at the offices of South Pacific Television, one of the country's two government-run television channels. We drove into town in torrential rain and parked the car. We were walking along a city street near SPTV's offices when I spied the familiar face of Philip Sherry, the channel's top newscaster. We shook hands and were engaging in pleasant small talk when he mentioned that he had heard me on the national radio program earlier that morning talking about UFOs.

For a moment I was stumped. But then I recalled that several weeks earlier I had sent a voice tape to Radio New Zealand concerning the mysterious disappearance of a young Melbourne pilot, Frederick Valentich, over Bass Strait. (See Appendix A). The 21-year-old pilot and his single-engine Cessna 182 had vanished exactly two months earlier, on 21 October, after Valentich reported he was being buzzed by a UFO. The story made headlines around the world and a producer from Radio New Zealand had called me up and asked for a five-minute tape on the incident. I was late getting the tape to him and he rang a couple of weeks later to say that my segment had not made the program. Nevertheless, he said that if the first program generated enough interest, he would consider doing another. As I stood there talking to Philip I

realised that a second program must have been made and later, when I got to Wellington, I confirmed this with the producer.

Ironically, Radio New Zealand picked a great day for a documentary on unidentified flying objects. They were not to know that only a few hours before their program was to go to air, an extraordinary sequence of events involving UFOs would take place right in their own backyard. But at the time I was talking to Philip I do not believe the early morning events had even been picked up by the news media. I certainly was not aware of the story and as we walked along the street I quickly put the Valentich mystery and the whole subject of UFOs out of my mind. I had far more important things to think about, such as holidays.

Later that day we arrived in Hamilton to stay with my sister and her family. During this time I remember reading a couple of newspaper stories about the 21 December sightings and I also watched a television news item that featured an interview with Vern Powell. I recall thinking that the television item could have been put together much better. But that was the sum total of my interest. It was the festive season and my sister and brother-in-law were determined that we should celebrate it in style.

On 23 December we said goodbye to Hamilton and took a flight to Wellington. Sue's father was waiting at the airport to meet us. There were handshakes, cuddles and kisses all around and soon we were in his car and heading over the Rimutaka Hills towards the beautiful farming district of the Wairarapa. Those first few days after our arrival were just great. The weather was perfect and soon I had settled into a routine of sunbathing, reading and long runs along country roads. I had been a jogger for many years but because of my recent heavy workload my running program had been sorely neglected. I was determined to return to Melbourne fit and trim. Sue was catching up on all the gossip with her mother and sisters, and the boys had quickly fallen in love with the outdoors.

The author with his wife Sue and their children, Sam, Ben and Daniel, on holiday in New Zealand in September 1981.

*FOOTNOTE: The New Zealand military authorities later denied they were involved in any exercises in the area at the time; and information on shipping movements, released several weeks later by the Royal New Zealand Air Force, made no mention of any Russian ships in the area, or any other large fishing boats capable of carrying helicopters. So, if the mystery objects were in fact helicopters, then it would seem likely that they were civilian craft. But why would a fleet of civilian helicopters be taking part in an extraordinary series of secret manoeuvres off a desolate piece of coast in the dead of the night? Also, one of the targets was monitored on radar almost continuously for about three hours and, during that time, it made approaches to both aircraft, finally following one down the coast for 12 miles. This mystery target also maintained a stationary position for about three-quarters of an hour, 60 miles off the coast. All of this behaviour would be unusual for any helicopter, civilian or military. I consulted an experienced helicopter pilot who said it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a helicopter to maintain a fixed position at night for any length of time, unless it was carrying very sophisticated equipment. As well, he said a civilian helicopter would not be able to remain airborne for three hours unless it had extra fuel tanks fitted. There is also the question of the speed of the objects, as reported on radar. Randle said the maximum speed was 130 knots, which is within the capabilities of some helicopters, but is too fast for the two most commonly used civilian helicopters in New Zealand – the Hughes 500 and the Bell Jetranger. A spokesman for Jayrow Helicopters Pty Ltd in Melbourne told me the Hughes 500 could reach 125 knots and the Jetranger 120 knots but both craft would have difficulty maintaining these maximum speeds. They normally cruise at between 112 and 115 knots. Taking all of this into account, I consider it most unlikely that helicopters were responsible for the visual and radar sightings.

Chapter 2: Omens

On 26 December I was out in the backyard reading when I heard the sound of a helicopter in the distance. I had recently developed a fascination for helicopters because Channel O had one on permanent hire and all reporters used it frequently. From personal experience I know that most people look up when a helicopter passes by, and I am no exception. On that sunny December morning I was surprised to see the machine coming straight towards the farmhouse. Then, as it passed overhead, I noticed the familiar red and yellow paintwork. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was Channel O's Hughes 500 that had been sold to a firm in New Zealand only a few weeks earlier. The last time I had seen it; it was being stripped down ready for delivery. I never thought I would see it again but here it was, thousands of kilometres from Melbourne, flying over the head of a somewhat puzzled television reporter. I remember thinking there was probably a message there somewhere. A few hours later the phone rang. It was Channel O on the line.

The caller was Leonard Lee, a journalist colleague and a friend of mine for nine years. He wanted to know if I had heard about the 21 December sightings which he said had grabbed the headlines in Melbourne. Evidently the Valentich story was still fresh in people's minds and another UFO story coming so hard on its heels was guaranteed plenty of publicity. I told Lee that I had read a couple of newspaper stories and seen a news item on television. He told me the channel was interested in a follow-up and he wanted to know if I would be willing to check out the story. I told him I would make some inquiries and call him back.

The helicopter and the phone call were not the only strange things that occurred during my stay at the farm. Another unusual incident took place on either 27 or 28 December. I cannot be exactly sure of the date, but I do know it was soon after the telephone call from Lee. I left the house for my daily run, passed the tethered sheep dogs who farewelled me with a loud chorus of barking, and jogged along the bitumen road in a northerly direction. It was a warm, sunny day and my route took me up a slight rise, along a flat section

and then down a small dip before veering up another hill to the right. It is quite a lonely section of road, bordered on one side by tall pine trees and open paddocks on the other. As I ran, I was thinking about Lee's phone call and, not surprisingly, UFOs. I reached the crest of the hill, continued along for several metres, and then turned around. As I started back down into the dip in the road, something rather odd occurred. Suddenly I felt apprehensive and confused, almost vulnerable. It was a strange feeling, which quickly passed. Soon I was through the dip and heading for home. However, the strangeness was to persist.

It was either after that particular run, or maybe it was after the run on the following day, that I noticed I was giving off a strong sulphur smell. I was struck by the pungency of the odour that was similar to the smell that permeates the thermal region of Rotorua, a city in the centre of the North Island, famous for its geysers and hot pools. I first noticed the smell soon after I had finished running and when I was perspiring freely. The odour seemed to be coming out of my pores. Sue also remarked on the smell and we discussed the possibility that it might have something to do with the town's drinking water supply. I thought that maybe the water had an overabundance of some trace element that was manifesting itself as a sulphur smell when I perspired.

But, back to the phone call from Lee. My first concern was to see if I could hire a film crew. I rang a friend at the Television One newsroom in Wellington and asked him if he could spare a crew but he said this might present some difficulties and he suggested I ring David and Ngaire Crockett, a husband-and-wife freelance crew. I called them up at their Wellington home and got David on the line. When I explained what I was hoping to do he was very enthusiastic but said that since he was already working on a documentary he was not sure whether he would be able to rearrange his schedule. I said I would call him back and I then began the laborious task of contacting the main participants of the 21 December sightings. Trying to get hold of people at Christmas, especially if they are government employees, is a difficult task because most are on holiday. But persistence paid off and after numerous phone calls I contacted all the principal witnesses.

Ngaire and David Crockett.

I called Vern Powell at his home in Blenheim and I was thrilled when he indicated he would have no objection to being interviewed. In fact he seemed very keen on the idea, which was perfect as he was to be the central character in the program I had planned. I made tentative arrangements to interview him at his home that Saturday. I then contacted the air traffic control section of the Ministry of Transport to arrange an interview with either John Cordy or Andy Herd, both government employees. I expected to strike some problems since I was aware from personal experience when covering the Valentich story in Melbourne that the authorities tended to clam up when UFOs were mentioned. I thought that as soon as I said the magic words, “television camera” and “UFOs,” I would get the same reaction. Much to my surprise, and delight, the gates of officialdom did not clang shut; they opened instead. I was told I could interview the controllers on duty at the time and I was even promised a copy of the log of the morning’s events. In the meantime, David had confirmed that he and Ngaire would be available on the days I required them.

Now came the make-or-break telephone call. I knew that if the program were really to succeed then I would have to avoid “talking heads” as much as possible and get plenty of visual material. Obviously the best way to do that would be to get on board an Argosy aircraft and retrace the route taken by

Vern Powell. So I was more than a little anxious when I put a call through to the home of Jim Howard, the operations manager for Safe Air. Jim was out, so I spoke to his wife Noelene.

When I introduced myself she immediately asked if I was the Quentin Fogarty who used to live at 185 Balmacewen Road in Dunedin, which is the second largest city in the South Island. I told her I was and she informed me that her family and mine had once been neighbours and that we had lived only two doors away. While I was still a youngster her family had sold their home to my parents and that was the house in which I had grown up. So I was not really surprised when I later phoned Jim Howard and he told me we could join the regular Argosy newspaper run from Wellington to Christchurch that Saturday night. I put down the phone, very pleased with the way things had fallen into place but also slightly taken aback by the smoothness of the operation so far. Something had to go wrong, I thought. And it did. But that was still four days away.

Although David and Ngaire had agreed to do the story, only David was available on the Friday when I had lined up interviews with John Cordy and Andy Herd at the Wellington air traffic control centre. Ngaire, who was David's sound recordist, also worked as a real estate agent and on this particular day she was busy selling properties. But there were no real problems since David was quite capable of operating both the camera and the tape-recorder for a simple interview.

I left Martinborough about midday and drove to Wellington with my brother-in-law John Ahearn, a bright and inquisitive 17-year-old who was on his Christmas vacation. John's ambition was to become a pilot and he was intensely interested in anything to do with aviation so I knew he would enjoy the visit to the Wellington air traffic control centre to watch the interviews being filmed and also to hear a UFO story at first hand.

When we reached Wellington, we drove through the city to the Crocketts' home in the suburb of Island Bay. David greeted us at the front door. He was obviously in his early 40s but, with his crop of dark hair and boyish good looks, he looked much younger. After introducing ourselves we loaded David's camera equipment into the car and drove to the air traffic control centre, which is situated on a hill above the airport.

Andy Herd was on duty and was waiting for us. John Cordy, who had the day off, arrived a few minutes later. A short, bespectacled man in his early 40s, John confessed that he should have been painting his house. It was obvious he welcomed the chance to get away from his paintbrush for a while and also to talk to us about the events of 21 December. I believe both John and Andy were a little annoyed with the local media who had largely ignored the controllers' side of the story. Ironically, the only other major inquiry had also come from Australia. The day before we arrived John had spent about 40 minutes on a long-distance call with a reporter from a Sydney newspaper. I could never fathom why the New Zealand media did not follow up the story. There were a couple of short newspaper articles, but nothing substantial.

We set up the camera equipment in a room that was used to co-ordinate search and rescue operations in the Wellington area and I went over the sightings with the two men. I quickly decided there was not much point in interviewing both men on film since their stories were basically the same. John, as the senior controller, was the obvious choice and he was, as they say in the television business, "good talent." The events of 21 December, which he described as "incredible," had obviously had a profound effect on him. He said he had never experienced a shift like it in all his years in air traffic control. He told me had an open mind on UFOs but he admitted there were things in the sky that morning he could not explain. I asked him if the returns he and Andy had picked up could have been such things as clouds, ships at sea, or even road traffic in the Clarence area. No, he didn't think so, because there were too many factors involved.

"We had people on the ground seeing things," he said, "pilots in the air seeing things and we had returns on radar."

He told me that in the past they had picked up ships on radar, especially large container vessels, but he said the return from a ship moved slowly and distinctly with a motion all of its own.

I was particularly intrigued by the target they had observed continuously for about three hours – this was the target that had first been seen tracking out from Wellington at 120 knots, had then moved rapidly towards Randle's aircraft, and later made a similar approach to Powell's plane before pacing it down the coast for 12 miles.

“It tracked out on a steady course to 60 miles and then stopped,” said John. “Now, when it stopped, theoretically it should have disappeared. We checked with the Kelburn Weather Office (in Wellington) and they told us they had launched a balloon but that it had burst 30 minutes previous to our inquiry. The track of the object was consistent with the winds at the time but I would not expect a burst weather balloon to stay there for at least 30 minutes, maybe even longer. “There was something substantial there. It was as big and as solid as the Argosy.”

Andy Herd, a quietly spoken man in his mid to late 20s, also admitted he was puzzled by the events of the morning of 21 December.

“There were several targets that I couldn’t explain,” he said.

“One was the target we tracked for approximately two and a half hours and which later moved in and paralleled the Argosy piloted by Captain Powell and First Officer Pirie.

“They observed it as a brilliant white light and I can offer no explanation.” He said the position and speed of the object on the radarscope were consistent with the observations of the flight crew.

“That target, and several others, were definitely unidentified, definitely airborne – hence flying – and they were either solid objects or masses of sufficient energy, created by some phenomena that I cannot explain, to give a good aircraft-like radar return.

“If that is what constitutes a UFO, then I’m sure that’s what we saw several times during the early hours of Thursday morning.”

John Cordy then mentioned other reported UFO sightings during the night of 20 December and the morning of the 21st. Evidently a number of people phoned the air traffic control centre with reports of strange lights in the sky. One caller, a 17-year-old girl, said she had been sleeping outside with three friends in the backyard of her home. At approximately 11.30pm on 20 December they were frightened into the house by “high-pitched weird noises.” The girl wanted to know if there had been any reports of UFOs in the area.

As I said, the Ministry of Transport gave me a copy of part of the air traffic control centre log for the period of the sightings and this confirmed other sightings at the same time, mostly along the Hutt Valley just north of

Wellington.

I quickly realised there was little chance of telling the story in the two five-minute segments the channel had asked me to do; however I was confident I would be able to persuade the newsroom that the program could be stretched to at least three segments, or maybe even a half-hour news special. There was obviously a lot of interest in the story in Australia, otherwise the channel would not have asked me to break my holidays.

After I had finished talking to John and Andy, David got some covering shots in the radar room and we then set up our gear outside so that I could do a short piece-to-camera. It went like this:

"The sightings by the crews of the Argosy aircraft are exciting in themselves but probably the most important link in the whole chain of events is this building, the Wellington air traffic control centre. It was here on the night in question that those UFOs were picked up on radar.

"The men who work here are professional air traffic controllers employed by the Ministry of Transport. They are hardly the sort of men to imagine things so when they talk about UFOs, it pays to sit back and listen."

We packed our gear, well satisfied with our first day's work. As John Ahearn and I drove back across the Rimutakas to Martinborough, I was starting to get the general format for the program fixed firmly in my mind. I had decided that the ideal spot for the opening segment would be the Kaikoura coast where most of the sightings had taken place. I intended to find a location that showed off the area's rugged coastline and snow-capped mountains. That night after dinner I sat down and wrote my opening piece-to-camera:

"This is the Kaikoura coast in New Zealand's South Island. It's an area famous for its scenery and its crayfish.

"However, over the past few weeks it's gained quite a reputation as the centre of some of the most concentrated UFO activity ever reported in this country.

"Understandably, many people find it difficult to accept that UFOs might exist. In these programs we believe we will present evidence that should change the sceptics among you into believers or, at the very least, make you more open-minded on the subject.

“There is always the slim chance that we’ve been conned by a number of highly trained and reliable government observers. There is also the possibility that somehow they all imagined they saw the same things at the same time, and in the same place.

“However, that just doesn’t make sense but we’ll leave you to be the judge.”

Like a number of segments I planned for the program, this particular piece was never to get to air. It was not even put down on film. The 21 December sightings were about to take a back seat.

Chapter 3: The Encounter

Saturday 30 December was my last morning on the farm and I was sad about leaving. Country life was beginning to agree with me. But I was due back at work in Melbourne on 9 January and I wanted to spend some time with my mother and our friends, the Grants, in Christchurch. Originally I had booked Sue, the boys and myself on an afternoon flight to Christchurch but because of the UFO story there had been a change in plans. Sue and the children still intended to catch the flight but I was now destined to go to Christchurch by a far more roundabout route. The Crocketts and I were booked on a later afternoon flight to Blenheim where we were to interview Vern Powell and then pick up our Argosy flight. The plan was to fly to Wellington that night where the aircraft would be loaded with Sunday newspapers and then to head south to Christchurch along the same route taken nine days earlier by Powell. We were due to reach Christchurch early on Sunday morning, all going well, and I had already arranged to ring Dennis Grant on my arrival so that he could come out to the airport and pick me up.

Sue and I were kept busy that morning packing and retrieving the children's toys that were spread all around the farm. Nevertheless, I did find time for a farewell run through the beautiful Wairarapa countryside. My daily six miles had become progressively easier over the past week and I was slowly getting back into shape. For Sue and the boys, it was only a temporary goodbye. They intended to return to the farm for a further two weeks' holiday once I had flown back to Australia.

We left just after lunch and, after driving to Wellington, Sue's father dropped me off at the Crocketts' house. Sue and the boys continued on to the airport to catch their flight. David met me at the door and introduced me to Ngaire. It was easy to believe she was the mother of five children; she gave off that warm, maternal confidence that comes from rearing and caring for a large family. I took an immediate liking to her. We sat down to the traditional cup of tea and I discussed what I hoped to achieve with the program. I had already written several voice-overs and link pieces and David and Ngaire

both seemed quite excited about the way the story was shaping up. Although our flight to Blenheim was not due to leave until just before five o'clock, we left for the airport a couple of hours earlier. I wanted to record two voice tracks outside the air traffic control centre that I intended to use as lead-ins to interviews with John Cordy and Vern Powell. The main reason for recording them outside was to keep the sound consistent with the piece-to-camera I had filmed the previous day.

The first voice-over went like this:

"There were two controllers on duty that night, senior controller John Cordy and Andy Herd. They first noticed the mystery objects on their radar screens about midnight.

"However, they didn't pay them much attention until about 25 minutes to one when one of their colleagues at Blenheim Flight Service, which is across Cook Strait in the South Island, rang to report several white lights, similar to aircraft landing lights, in the direction of Clarence on the Kaikoura coast.

"The air traffic controllers checked their radar screens and sure enough there were three or four targets in the Clarence area."

Voice-over, number two:

"Of course, no program on UFOs would be complete without advancing some theories as to what they might be.

"Not surprisingly, the sightings have been argued away by some official bodies as possibly fireballs and even the planet Venus.

" John Cordy says he has yet to see Venus move around his radar screen at 120 knots, stop, and then head off down the coast in pursuit of an aircraft.

"Air New Zealand [the country's national airline] captain Bruce Cathie, one of the country's leading UFO experts, has his own theories.

"He has gone into print with the claim that some UFOs sighted in recent years are earth-based, the product of a worldwide group of scientists who have combined their research into one major experiment.

"Cathie also believes some of the objects come from outer space and that earth scientists have studied these craft, learned their secrets and have come up with their own designs.

"He claims details of this research have been kept secret from the public

because it is so advanced it makes everything else obsolete.

“ If New Zealand’s defence department does know something about Cathie’s claims, it is not letting on.

“The department has been informed of the latest sightings and is investigating them. But, as a spokesman told me, there is no official body to investigate such reports and the government does not appear to have any policy on UFOs at all.

“He says they will look into the matter, but he does not believe they will come up with any answers.”

We boarded our Fokker Friendship and took off for Blenheim, which is only a hop, step and a jump across Cook Strait, the waterway separating New Zealand’s two main islands. Because of the short distance involved the aircraft never went above 4500 feet, which meant that we hit every bit of turbulence across the notoriously rough passage. That was when Ngaire confessed that flying was not one of her strong points but, since she had agreed to do the assignment, she intended to see it through to the bitter end.

We touched down just after five o’clock. It was a beautiful evening, typical of the Marlborough province at that time of the year. It was obvious there was going to be a brilliant sunset later that evening. We loaded the camera and sound equipment into a taxi and drove to the Powell home. Vern and his wife, who was also named Ngaire, gave us a warm welcome. Vern, a large, expansive man, had the confidence of a person used to being in charge. He was still very excited about his experiences and eager to tell me about them on film. There was sufficient daylight to do the interview outside so we set up in the backyard. Vern proved an ideal subject. He was outgoing, articulate and obviously tickled pink to be the centre of so much attention. He told me of his life-long interest in UFOs and he mentioned that his daughter had seen something unusual in the sky several years before. For 36 years he had searched the skies himself, but to no avail. So, naturally, he was thrilled that at long last his patience had been rewarded.

The first part of the interview dealt with the facts as told to me by the air traffic controllers and reported by the news media. Once we had confirmed these, I tried to probe a little deeper. I wanted a human reaction to Vern Powell’s strange experiences. I asked him to describe how he felt when he

looked out of his port window on the climb out of Blenheim and saw that bright, white light, tinged with red. Was he scared? No, replied Vern, he was not scared, but he was excited. He told me that he had come to the conclusion that UFOs did exist and that if they were going to harm anyone they would have done so a long time ago. What about Frederick Valentich, I asked, had he thought about that particular incident at the time of his strange experience? He said he could remember the story, now that I had mentioned it, but had not given it any thought at the time. Finally, I asked him if he had suffered any ridicule, either from fellow pilots, his friends or his family. No, he said, none at all.

After we finished the interview we still had several hours before we were due at the airport to pick up our Argosy flight. The Powells kindly loaned us a car and we went into the town centre to have a meal and do some sightseeing. We were back at the Powells' just before nine o'clock and Vern and Ngaire offered to drive us out to the airport. As we travelled through the flat, river-plain countryside in the gathering darkness, I was feeling pleased with the way things were going. All we needed to complete the first part of the program were some night-time flying sequences. As it turned out, we were to get far more than we bargained for.

Sierra Alpha Echo, the Safe Air freighter involved in the sightings of 31 December 1978.

The Argosy was waiting on the tarmac at Woodbourne aerodrome when we

drove through the gates just before half-past nine. Our aircraft that night was to be Sierra Alpha Echo, which had been under the command of Captain John Randle on the morning of 21 December.

Vern and his wife drove us straight to the aircraft and helped us load our gear. It felt strange climbing on board a freight aircraft for the first time. My initial impression was one of starkness and spaciousness. The plane was no more than a metal shell and it had an eerie feel about it. I am sure that if the cargo hold had been filled with rows of seats I would have felt more at ease. There were certainly none of the frills and comforts of passenger aircraft. The seats that Ngaire and I were to occupy were at the back of the aircraft in the large door that swings back to allow cargo to be loaded and off-loaded. There were no windows and leg room was at a premium. The only part of the plane that had any feeling of warmth and security was the flight deck, which was up a narrow ladder in the nose of the aircraft. There was one passenger seat on the flight deck and, because I wanted some film of take-offs and landings, that seat was reserved for David.

We spent more time looking over the aircraft than we had planned and by the time Vern and Ngaire drove us across to the Safe Air offices, our crew was getting slightly worried until we explained where we had been. The crew consisted of Captain Bill Startup and First Officer Bob Guard. They seemed quite excited about being part of a television program. Although Jim Howard had given me their names, neither David, Ngaire nor I had met Bill and Bob until we walked into the briefing room that night. Bill said he had been asked to co-operate with us and that he would do everything possible to make our trip comfortable.

Captain Bill Startup.

We wanted some footage of the plane on the tarmac with the engines being started so I went on board with the crew while David and Ngaire set up their film gear a little way from the aircraft. The camera was rolling as Bill started two of the Argosy's four turbo-prop engines. Sierra Alpha Echo roared to life. When David finished filming, he and Ngaire climbed on board and we all settled in our seats. Bill started the two remaining engines and the Argosy began taxiing to its take-off area.

In our cramped rear section Ngaire and I sat facing the metal bulkhead, listening as the pitch of the engines increased in intensity. I was thinking about the job ahead and going over the shooting schedule in my mind. Ngaire's main concern was her immediate environment. She was not particularly happy about the fact that our seats were in the section of the aircraft that swings open for loading and unloading, but she kept her fears to herself. Meanwhile, the Argosy had reached the end of the runway and the crew were completing their pre-flight checks. Satisfied that everything was in order, Bill gave the command and Sierra Alpha Echo thundered down the runway and kicked out over Cook Strait towards Wellington. It was just after 10 o'clock.

Flying "freight" was certainly an experience. The most over-powering sensation was the noise. It reached out and enveloped us. Back there in the tail of the aircraft conversation was almost impossible. As well as noise from the engines, there was a rush of air around the back of the plane, which sounded like a gale. It was also slightly claustrophobic due to the complete absence of windows. In spite of all that, I enjoyed the flight across to Wellington but Ngaire was extremely pleased when we touched down.

While we relaxed in the freight terminal, waiting for the Argosy to be loaded, I had the chance to talk to the crew for the first time. Bill Startup was quite a character. He was a small man with a slightly pixie-like face and a sense of humour to match. Evidently it was his turn to make the tea and he served us all a strong cuppa that he brewed up in a small kitchen inside the freight terminal. Startup was far more outgoing than Bob Guard who was quiet, maybe even a little shy. But he too was friendly and courteous and by the time we reboarded the Argosy we were all very much at ease in each other's company. Just before midnight we lumbered down the runway with our load

of Sunday newspapers and set course for Christchurch, via the Kaikoura coast.

The climb out of Wellington was fairly bumpy. The city hugs the hills around the bottom of the North Island and is almost constantly exposed to the strong winds that whip in from Cook Strait. Landing and taking off at Wellington airport can be a frightening experience, even for seasoned air travellers. Ngaire and I waited for the seatbelt sign to be switched off and then walked up through the cargo area with its stacks of newly printed newspapers to the flight deck. It was a warm night and we were all in shirtsleeves. Bill was seated on the left side, Bob was on the right and David was in the spare seat that slides out between the pilot and co-pilot. It was very cramped with five people on the flight deck and it was impossible to stand upright. Ngaire and I were forced to stoop to look out of the windows.

We stayed on the flight deck for only a short time after take-off for we had work to do in the cargo area. I planned to do two pieces-to-camera; one was to be a link piece, the other was a closing segment for the first program. I had decided to cheat a little because I wanted to get this particular part of the filming over and done with as soon as possible. That would allow us plenty of time to get interiors of the flight deck and the crew at their controls. The closing segment should really have been filmed as we approached Christchurch airport, but who would by any the wiser if we did it at the start of the flight? I reproduce that segment here in full, just to point out that we had no idea of what was in store for us.

"Well, although we had no luck in sighting anything mysterious on our trip tonight, our story doesn't end here.

"In the next segment we'll be bringing you more evidence that you will find hard to refute.

"Until then, this is Quentin Fogarty, reporting for News at Six, at 14,000 feet off New Zealand's Kaikoura coast."

I thought that had a certain touch of class. Few reporters get the chance to say that sort of thing in the belly of an Argosy thundering along the New Zealand coast in the dead of night.

David and Ngaire set up their gear among the piles of newspapers and we began filming. I had decided to keep the segments in order, so I did the

opening piece first. I fought to have my voice heard above the deafening noise in the cargo hold:

"We are now approaching the Clarence River area where the heaviest concentration of UFOs was sighted on December 21.

"We're at an altitude of 14,000 feet and we're on exactly the same route taken by Captain Powell when he encountered those mysterious objects.

"It's a beautiful, clear night outside and naturally we'll be looking out for anything unusual."

We had just finished take one when Bill Startup left his seat on the flight deck and poked his head down the stairway. He indicated we should get up on the flight deck as soon as possible. He did not say why but it was fairly obvious something was going on. I felt a surge of adrenalin and I shouted Bill's message across to David and Ngaire. I asked David if he was happy with the take and began to remove the neck microphone so that I could get up the stairs. David wanted to do the take again and although my every instinct said to hell with take two, I reluctantly complied with David's wishes. I have since been asked how I could have ignored Startup's message and gone on with the filming. I would like to emphasise that we were on board the Argosy for a very specific purpose – to obtain film for a series of television programs. If David, as the cameraman, was not happy, then there was every chance that the take we had just done would be useless. Also, at that stage we still did not know why Startup wanted us on the flight deck, although I had a "gut feeling" that we had company. Anyway, the segment was extremely brief and another take would delay us for only about 30 seconds. So we went ahead and completed our filming.

The closing segment was forgotten in the rush to get up the stairs. I was the first on to the flight deck. David and Ngaire had to gather up their equipment and David had to change film magazines. I would estimate that they were about two minutes behind me. Bill and Bob were both looking towards the front, right-hand side of the aircraft. They pointed out the lights of Kaikoura township in the distance and that was when my heart skipped a beat. There, apparently hovering above the town, was a row of bright, pulsating lights. The crew had spotted the lights several minutes earlier and it did not take them very long to realise they were looking at something unusual. After all,

the night sky was their domain. They had flown the same route many times before and they were familiar with the conventional light sources in the area. But these lights were neither stars, planets, ground lights, fishing boats nor cabin light reflections. Intrigued, the crew decided to call up the Wellington air traffic control centre. The radar operator on duty was Geoff Causer.

PLANE: Have you any targets over Kaikoura Peninsula way showing up on your [unintelligible]?

RADAR: There is [sic] targets in your one o'clock position at, uh, 13 miles, appearing and disappearing. At the moment they're not showing, but were showing about one minute ago.

Bill then asked Geoff if he would keep an eye on the targets and that was when he left his seat to call us up on to the flight deck. Unknown to the flight crew, Causer had been observing anomalous targets off the Kaikoura coast for about half an hour but because of their erratic nature he did not consider they were solid targets and he had not yet informed the Argosy of their presence. He was also busy directing an Air New Zealand flight into Wellington airport. But, with the call from the Argosy, his interest quickened.

Meanwhile, on the flight deck of the Argosy it was excitement plus. I was totally fascinated by the row of lights pulsating in the distance. On closer inspection I realised they were not exactly above the town but slightly out to sea. At times there were six or seven in a row. One would fade and disappear and suddenly another would grow and pulsate. To me they were like globes of pulsating light, ranging in colour from yellowish white to orange with a red tinge. When they expanded they did so quickly and they retained their brilliance from a pinpoint to the final globular shape. It was like watching a string of incandescent bulbs being turned on and off. Occasionally the lights shone downwards, like the beam from a searchlight.

Unfortunately I missed some of these visual displays as I had to relinquish my position by the windows to allow David freedom to film. This meant that I could not watch the lights continuously. Nevertheless, I do recall one of the objects lighting up its surroundings. It may have been cloud, or it could have been the foreshore. The reader may recall that both the ground and the aerial observers on the morning of 21 December watched similar shafts of light being beamed downwards.

There was nothing particularly frightening about this initial encounter. The lights were quite a distance from us and they appeared to be stationary. I did not for one moment feel as though we were in any danger, but I was excited. To be quite honest I would have been excited without having seen the lights. For me it was a thrilling experience just to be on the flight deck. It was cramped and warm and we had a breathtaking view of the heavens. It was certainly a lot more fun than the rather sterile, plastic world of commercial flying.

Bill Startup was seated on the left side of the aircraft and Ngaire was standing behind him. David was behind Bob Guard's seat on the right and I was crouched behind him. David was desperately trying to film the objects but it was proving difficult. Just as he focused on them, they would disappear. Then he would take the camera away from his eye and suddenly they would light up again. It was impossible for him to set up his tripod; there was not enough room. Even when he was hand-holding, the camera magazine kept knocking against overhead switches. It did not take us long to realise that the flight deck of the Argosy was not designed for filming UFOs. While a frustrated David Crockett did his best to capture the elusive lights, the communications between the aircraft and the radar room continued. Here are some of those early messages.

RADAR: Sierra Alpha Echo, target briefly appeared 12 o'clock to you at 10 miles ... disappeared again.

PLANE: Thank you.
RADAR: Sierra Alpha Echo, target, strong target, showing at 11 o'clock at three miles.
PLANE: Thank you. No contact yet.
RADAR: Disappearing now.
RADAR: Sierra Alpha Echo, target now just left of nine o'clock at about two miles.
PLANE: Thank you.
RADAR: Sierra Alpha Echo, strong target at 10 o'clock at 12 miles.

At first I did not think about doing any sort of commentary. I was too engrossed in the spectacular light show outside the window and I was also listening in on the communications between the plane and Geoff Causer. But

as we progressed down the coast I decided I should get something on tape, just for the record. Ngaire handed me a neck microphone and I started talking.

“I’m going off this intercom now and ... give it to David. I’m just going to talk.

“Okay, David, can you film with this [headphones/intercom] on?”

I then passed the headphones to David. Meanwhile, Ngaire was crouched down behind Bill’s seat operating the tape-recorder. I began:

“It’s fairly hard to describe my feelings at the moment, but we’ve probably seen six or seven, or even more, bright lights over Kaikoura and a number of these have been picked up by Wellington radar.

“We’re now turning around once more to see if we can get a clearer sight of these objects.

“It really is just a little strange and a little eerie. It’s a beautiful night out here, very bright. There are a lot of stars out ... but these objects are not stars.”

It was now beginning to dawn on me that we had stumbled upon something rather strange. We were getting an incredible visual display to the front and the right of the aircraft. A bright globe of light would suddenly light up in front of us, disappear, and then another would appear nearby. They seemed to be in their element. It was almost as if they were engaged in some sort of enjoyable game. There was a feeling of vitality, even fun, in their performance. By comparison, our lumbering Argosy seemed like a fish out of water. I remember a day or two later telling a reporter from the British Broadcasting Corporation that it was as though we had stumbled upon a UFO playground.

About 12.22 am, which was about 10 minutes after the crew first noticed the lights, Bill informed Wellington radar that he intended to make a left orbit and then come back on track.

RADAR: Roger, and there’s another target that just appeared on your left side, about one mile, briefly, and then disappeared again.

PLANE: We haven’t got him in sight as yet, but we do pick up the lights around Kaikoura.

RADAR: Roger.

A few seconds later:

RADAR: As you turn left, the target I mentioned a moment ago is still just about five o'clock to you now, stationary. [This would indicate that the target moved to the right rear of the aircraft as it turned.]

The plane then completed its left orbit and regained its original southbound heading.

RADAR: Target [previously at five o'clock to the plane as it began its turn] is 12 o'clock at three miles. [This suggests that the target remained stationary as the plane completed its turn.]

PLANE: Thank you. We pick it up ... it's got a flashing light.

Meanwhile, I kept up my commentary:

"We're now heading back down towards Kaikoura ... we can see the lights of the town. At the moment there's no activity.

"When we first made the run the lights were so bright they appeared to be lighting up the sky over the town ... now we have a couple right in front of us, very, very bright. That was more of an orange-reddy light ... it flashed on and then off again.

"And there is another one out to the right of it. This gets the old adrenalin flowing ever so slightly.

"They're still there. You can see the one to the right of us is still reasonably bright ... [pause] ... oh well, I can say one thing for sure now, we have a firm convert here at this moment."

By this time there was a very excited radar operator back at the Wellington air traffic control centre. Geoff Causer must have been wondering what the hell was going on. There were not supposed to be any aircraft in the area, apart from our Argosy, and that was the only target he should have been getting. But his radar screens were showing a number of targets. He did not even know there was a television crew on board the Argosy until Bill mentioned it soon after the initial sightings.

The messages between Geoff Causer and the plane were quite incredible, even disturbing. Take this sequence of events for example. The time was about 12.30 am and Geoff informed the aircraft there was a target about one

mile behind it. The target remained stationary for a minute or so before disappearing off the screen. Another target then appeared at three o'clock to the aircraft.

About half a minute later Wellington told the crew "there's a strong target right in formation with you ... your target has doubled in size." Think about that for a moment. For at least 36 seconds, and maybe for as long as 47 seconds, the aircraft return was twice as large as it should have been. One way to achieve this phenomenon would be to have another aircraft fly within one mile of your wing-tip. But since ours was the only known aircraft up there that morning, we can assume that this was not the case. The only conclusion is that those mysterious objects had something to do with the merging pattern that painted on the radar screen.

Although I could not hear the conversations between the plane and Geoff Causer, because they were being relayed through headphones, some of the information was being passed back to me over the noise of the engines. This was how I reacted when David told me about the radar target on our tail:

"We've just heard from Wellington radar that we've got an object about one mile behind us and it's following us.

"Of course we can't see it ... let's hope they're friendly!"

When I get scared, my legs go heavy and lose all feeling. At this stage they were like huge blobs of jelly, totally unfeeling and each weighing a ton. I was rooted to the flight deck. Even if I had had somewhere to run, I do not think I would have been able to move. It felt as though someone had hit me in the stomach with a sledgehammer. There was something on our tail! By now my thought processes were in turmoil; little doors were opening and shutting. What the hell was going on? Somewhere in the dark recesses of my reeling brain came the realisation that maybe those things out there knew we were there. After all, we could see them; what was to stop them from seeing us? Why else were they paying us a close call?

For a short time I considered the possibility that I might come to some harm, that I might die. I began to think about Sue and the boys. It was a draining, emotional experience that was heightened by the knowledge that there was absolutely nothing I could do to escape my environment. I felt very much alone. Ngaire told me later that she was going through much the same sort of

torment. Here she was, a housewife, the mother of five children, trapped on board an aircraft. She did not even like flying. Some of her fear could be attributed to the fact that for most of the trip she had been crouched behind Bill Startup's seat operating the tape-recorder. All she could hear was my rather strained voice describing what was happening. Like me, she would have been much happier in another place, with somewhere to run, to escape. Anywhere but on board that Argosy.

The news that we had something behind us also affected the others on board, although perhaps not to the same extent. Like most cameramen, David was completely lost in his viewfinder and the full significance of that particular incident was not to hit him until later. Bill Startup's concern was evidenced by the fact that he twice put the aircraft into 360-degree turns in a vain attempt to see what was on our tail. As he told me later, he had been a little apprehensive "because we didn't have full control of what was around us."

My real fear did not last long. Maybe I was already in a state of shock. I began to feel that if I was going to die there was not really very much I could do about it. And for some reason I did not think that dying would be a painful affair. Then, as it became more obvious that we were not going to come to any harm, the feeling began to return to my legs. Also I began to realise that I had experienced something profound, even spiritual. I do not mean spiritual in any religious sense. It was more a feeling that I had witnessed and experienced something above the physical level.

As we passed south of Kaikoura, Bob Guard pointed out a light off the starboard side of the plane. Bill Startup called up Wellington radar.

PLANE: Got a target at three o'clock, just behind us.

RADAR: Oh yes, and going around now at four o'clock at four miles.

This was my reaction:

"I'm now looking over towards the right of the aircraft and we have an object confirmed by Wellington radar.

"It's been following us for quite a while ... it's about four miles away and it looks like a very faint star, but then it emits a very bright white and green light.

"At this stage we're not having much luck filming these objects because they

just appear and disappear."

Bob Guard described our companion as a small, steady white light with a greenish tinge or fleck. He said it was "like passing a light aircraft at night."

As I mentioned earlier I was not listening to the conversations between the plane and Wellington radar, or between Geoff Causer and Christchurch radar. Later I was to hear a recording of those messages. This was how Geoff informed Christchurch of what was happening: "Sierra Alpha Echo is UFO hunting with me and doing some orbits north of Kaikoura. Will call you back shortly."

A little later, Christchurch called Wellington to say that he had the Argosy on his screen and he asked Geoff if he had any other targets. Geoff replied that he had seen something a short time before and that he had been asked by the plane if he had anything on his screen: "We both confirmed we could see it, you know, a weird target. He did see something earlier that he did an orbit to check on. He has got a TV crew on board and they're listening and taking recordings."

As we moved closer to Christchurch, we began to receive messages from the radar operators there. They informed us they had picked up a target about 68 miles north of the city. At the same time we heard from Wellington that a target that had been on our tail for about 10 minutes had been joined by two others. I remember saying on my taped commentary that it would be interesting to see whether these targets stayed with us, or whether they disappeared before we reached the outskirts of the city. A short time later Bill Startup put the Argosy into another 360-degree orbit in an attempt to spot our mysterious companions. When we completed that turn and were back on course, the lights of Christchurch were in front of us. About this time I recall someone, either Bill or David, telling me that Christchurch had just informed the plane there were six targets coming straight towards us. Later, neither Bill nor David could recall any such message and it was possible that I misheard because of the noise of the engines.

Unfortunately, it later proved impossible to check the messages between the aircraft and Christchurch radar because the tape was erased. However, Bill and Bob do recall a message from the Christchurch controller informing us there was a target to the right of the aircraft and apparently travelling with us.

Bob Guard remembers looking out and seeing a light which was flashing on and off. At first he thought it was a car headlight passing behind trees along a road that follows the shoreline but he soon realised that the flashing was too regular, and the light apparently crossed a river at the speed of the aircraft. Bob was not able to study the light for any length of time because the plane was now on its landing approach and there were things to be done on the flight deck. Unknown to us, the radar target accompanying the Argosy suddenly veered away and headed off inland in a south-easterly direction. At the same time, one of the men on duty at the Christchurch tower went outside and saw a faint, rapidly moving light apparently in the direction of the radar return. Later the air traffic controller and the radar operator suggested that the target was the result of a side-lobe effect, in other words a ghost echo of the aircraft return.

A few weeks later Dr Bruce Maccabee tried to obtain further information about this event but the controller was reluctant to discuss the incident and told Maccabee that he had not seen any unusual targets. It would have been helpful if the tape of the messages that passed between the plane and Christchurch had been kept. Bill Startup did ask that the tape be held until he could get a copy but it was erased before he had a chance to do this.

While Bill and Bob watched the strange light out to the starboard side of the aircraft, Ngaire and I were settling into our seats at the rear of the plane in preparation for landing. Just before we touched down we discussed a conversation we had had with Bill. He had offered us the chance of a return flight to Blenheim. Originally our plan was to disembark at Christchurch, spend the night there, and head up to the Kaikoura coast in the morning to do some more filming. I had already booked David and Ngaire into a motel and I was expected at the Grants where Sue and the boys were waiting for me. Ngaire was adamant that nothing on God’s earth was going to drag her back on board the Argosy that morning. Later she was to tell me in detail how she felt.

“Crouching behind the pilot’s seat, as I was for most of the time, I could only hear the different levels in people’s voices,” she said.

“When you weren’t talking to me, David would lift one of my earphones and tell me that there were three behind us, or something like that.” Ngaire’s sense of uneasiness was heightened by the fact that both Bill and Bob kept

looking to see what was behind the aircraft.

“I think what finally finished it off for me was when Bill turned around and asked how I was feeling. I really thought that was it. I didn’t think we were going to make Christchurch.”

Ngaire had simply had enough and I understood exactly how she felt. I too was most reluctant to accept Bill’s offer and I remember thinking, why tempt fate? As we taxied towards the terminal building I was still undecided.

We were met with eager inquiries from the ground staff as we disembarked. News of our exploits had certainly travelled fast. Ironically, as I was trying to explain what we had seen, I noticed a bright light in the sky just above a row of parked aircraft. It was very similar to the lights we had seen on the downward trip. It was a bright, orange-yellow colour and it appeared to fade and pulsate. Those on the ground were quick to point out that it was probably the light on a radio mast. I knew that was not the case as the light was too high and not even in the direction of the masts that could be seen dimly in the distance. I asked David to set up his camera, since it seemed like a good opportunity to get a ground-based shot, but Bill Startup was eager to get to the radar room. So we grabbed our gear and followed. In retrospect, I wish we had taken the time to get some footage of that particular light but at the time I was confused and disoriented. The prospect of a cup of coffee and a cigarette in the warmth and comfort of the radar room was very compelling. So I turned my back on our friend in the sky and walked into the terminal building.

I still had not made up my mind about the return trip, although my curiosity was starting to get the better of me. David, on the other hand, was extremely keen to go back. He knew he had very little footage and he wanted more. Gradually I came around to his way of thinking. There was also the fact that I was supposed to be in charge of the assignment. I could hardly crawl off to the security of my bed and leave the cameraman on his own.

Also, the light show on the way down had been a compelling spectacle. The chance of an encore finally became too hard to resist.

Chapter 4: Encore

Once inside the radar room I was eager to call my wife who had arrived at the Grants about eight hours earlier with Daniel and Benny. Dennis Grant, who is also a television journalist, answered the phone. He was somewhat taken aback when I began to tell him what had happened and at first he thought I was joking. I soon convinced him that it was no joke and he said he would drive straight out to the airport. Unknown to me, Dennis had already decided he was going to get on board the Argosy at all costs. Then Sue came on the line and when I told her I intended to go back to Blenheim she said she would come out to the airport with Dennis.

Ngaire Crockett marks up the slate for Fogarty's piece to camera in the Christchurch radar room.

I had decided to do a short piece-to-camera in the radar room to explain the events so far and the fact that we were going back up in the Argosy. I began by giving the time, which was then about 1:45 am, and said that in about 20 minutes we would be taking off again. I mentioned that Wellington radar had told us there were still targets in the Kaikoura area and finished with the comment, "so this time we're hoping to get better film, and all I can say is

we'll see what happens." Ngaire then gave me a crash course on how to operate the tape-recorder as I intended to continue my commentary if we sighted any more unusual lights.

Dennis and Sue reached the airport in record time and Dennis casually mentioned that he would quite like to get on board the aircraft. I did not want to share the story with anyone but I also had no desire to upset a friend of long standing. I did my best to put him off the idea but he was persistent. He knew that Ngaire had decided not to go back and that there was a spare seat. I pointed out that Bill Startup had kindly offered to accommodate David and me on arrival in Blenheim and that I did not want to impose on his hospitality by asking if he could put up Dennis as well.

"That's okay," said Dennis, "I'll stay in a motel." Finally, he settled the issue for me. "If you don't ask Bill," he said, "I will."

So rather reluctantly I agreed and once Bill had established that Dennis was a bona fide journalist, he said he could come along. Perhaps I should point out here that Dennis and I remain good friends. If I had been in his shoes, I think I would have been just as persistent.

Of course, once Dennis had got himself a berth, Sue felt a little left out of things. She is also a journalist and she wanted to come along. I was extremely relieved that there were only three passenger seats on the Argosy and that they were all taken. I was not very keen on the idea of the two of us venturing into the unknown; after all, at the time we did have two little boys to think about. Although it might seem melodramatic now, we were concerned enough about the return flight to leave all the film shot on the downward leg with Ngaire. Better, we thought, to be safe than sorry.

Now came the hard part, saying goodbye to Sue. We had been through a lot together in the six years we had known each other, but this was completely different. We stood there on the tarmac, holding on to one another and although I loved her incredibly at that moment, I also felt very remote from her. It was as if an invisible barrier had been placed between us. Sue told me later that she had found me distant and not quite "with it." I kissed her goodbye and climbed aboard the plane.

David made his way to the flight deck and Dennis and I strapped ourselves into our berths in the loading bay. It was a strange feeling being back on

board and, as we taxied towards our take-off point, I noticed that I was trembling. I might add that this had nothing to do with excitement. I had passed that state a long time ago. No, there was a much more basic reason for my involuntary shaking – it had suddenly dawned on me where I was and what I was doing, and I was scared! That was the pattern of my mental state during those incredible few hours. One moment I was completely detached from what was going on around me, something akin to watching a movie. Then suddenly I would get this terrible rush of acid to my stomach, my heart would start pounding, and I would realise that I was not a spectator; I was one of the main characters. A number of people said to me later they thought I had been extremely brave to go back on that flight to Blenheim. I can assure you that I was not feeling particularly brave as the Argosy shook itself free of the ground.

Two minutes later the fun began! The aircraft was still climbing and breaking through cloud when those on the flight deck realised we had company again. Through a starboard window the crew could see a bright light, apparently keeping track with the aircraft. Back in the loading bay the seat belt sign had gone off and Dennis and I unbuckled and went up through the empty belly of the aircraft towards the flight deck. By the time we got up the stairs, Bill Startup had a target confirmed on the aircraft radar on our starboard side. It was then just within the 20-mile range. Later it was to move as close as 10 miles on the radarscope.

By the time we were about 10 miles from Christchurch we were above most of the cloud and David was filming. Initially the light outside the window did not fade or disappear, much to David's delight. At first I saw two lights, one above the other. The upper light was very bright, the lower one not quite as bright. I remember having to stand very close to the window to see the second light much further below us. As we climbed higher I did not see the second light again and I now believe there was only one bright object and the second light was simply a reflection on the surface of the sea, or on a cloud bank. Later Dennis confirmed that he too recalled seeing the object reflecting on the water.

About six minutes out of Christchurch I taped this message:

"Those two lights appear to be travelling with us. They're still off the starboard wing.

“The brighter one is still above the other and it’s moved a little further ahead. It’s extremely bright, much brighter than any of the other stars in the sky.

“Now it’s just dimmed ... it’s gone, it’s back again. It appears to be going behind cloud.

“I can’t quite make out whether in fact it is going behind cloud or whether in fact the light is just dimming ... no, it’s such a bright light ... it’s lighting up the clouds around it.

“It’s by far the best of the unidentified flying objects we’ve seen so far ... [pause] ...

“We’ve just heard that Wellington radar have more targets at Clarence, so it looks like this is going to be an eventful trip back to Blenheim.”

As we headed up the coast, Bob Guard called up Wellington radar to inform them that we had a “great big target sitting at three o’clock to us at the moment at 11,500 feet.” At the time the target was about 12 miles from the aircraft.

PLANE: Do you have anything as far ranging as that?

RADAR: I’m sorry, I can’t see that far. My maximum range is 150 [miles] from Wellington.

PLANE: Understood.

RADAR: I’ve got plenty of targets waiting for you off Clarence and north of Kaikoura.

PLANE: Roger, thanks.

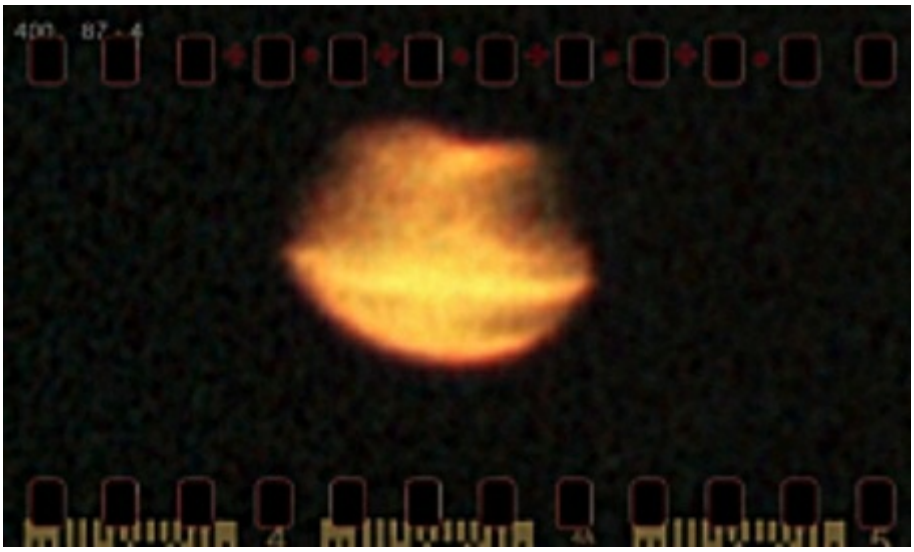
To Dennis and me the object off the starboard wing appeared as a roundish bright light, yellowish white in colour. Bob Guard thought it looked like a squashed orange. At first Bill Startup thought he was looking at a full moon but he quickly realised there were no lunar features, and anyway, the moon had already set behind him. On the other hand, David, with the aid of his zoom lens, was looking at something completely different, something out of this world. The lens had cut through the brightness and had revealed an object with definite structure. David stopped filming for a moment to describe what he could see. My poor old heart began to work overtime again.

“The bright object is still with us, just off our starboard side.

“According to our cameraman David Crockett, who has been filming it for the past few moments, it appears to have a brightly lit bottom and a transparent sort of sphere on top. So, it appears to be ... well, like a flying saucer.

“ I’m watching it right at the moment ... it’s extremely bright. It’s very hard with the naked eye to pick up any details because the light is so bright.

“It must have been following us now for close to 10 to 12 minutes.”



This image is thought to be close to the actual shape of the object filmed north of Christchurch. Fogarty’s commentary at the time described it thus: “It appears to have a brightly-lit bottom and transparent sort of sphere on top, so it appears to be well, like a flying saucer.”

We kept on our northerly track until we were about 35 miles from Christchurch. We were at an altitude of 13,000 feet and the plane was on automatic pilot. Bill Startup decided it was time for a little test. He wanted to see what would happen if we turned towards the object. Dennis beckoned me over (he was on the port side of the flight deck behind Bill, and I was on the starboard side behind Bob Guard), and told me of Bill’s plan. Dennis was quite concerned that the object might misconstrue our move as an act of aggression. I did not really share his concern because by this stage I did not think we were in any danger. Nevertheless, I could understand why Dennis

was worried. After all, he had been on the aircraft for only a short time and this was his first “encounter.” He was going through much the same sort of soul-searching I had experienced when I heard we had an object on our tail on the downward journey. I now felt as though I were an old hand at the UFO business.

Bill put the Argosy into a 90-degree turn towards the object, at the same time keeping a close watch on his instruments. He had decided that if he noticed anything unusual with his instrumentation he would turn back on course immediately. But the instruments behaved normally and, as we turned, the object appeared to move towards the front of the aircraft. Dennis, who took notes throughout the journey, recalls that just after the turn, at about 2:30 am, the object was in front of us for about 30 seconds and then began to move around to the right. The target had disappeared from the aircraft radar by this stage and the most logical explanation was that the object had dropped below the radar sweep.

Neither Christchurch nor Wellington ground radar picked up this particular object, for very good reasons. To start with, Wellington had already indicated to the plane that the object was outside their range and the Christchurch radar room was not operating during the return journey of the Argosy. According to a controller on duty at the time, they were not requested to monitor the plane’s departure, so they shut down their operations.

As we travelled along our new course, I kept up a running commentary on tape:

“We’re moving towards it and it’s just above us ... it’s moving extremely quickly, extremely quickly ... it’s going down, it’s now moving towards the front of the aircraft, or maybe we’re moving towards it, I can’t really tell.

“It’s quite incredible. It’s moving away from us now and appears to be picking up speed ... it’s now practically level with us, almost in front ... it’s an incredible sight.

“It’s now just below us, in front and below. It has got to be something. It’s certainly not the planet Venus as many people would like you to believe.

“I must admit that this is just a bit frightening, when you’re confronted with something that has no logical explanation, something that has puzzled people for many years ... people who report these sorts of things get scoffed at.

“I admit, I’ve always been rather open-minded on the subject, but I’m convinced now ... because it’s there!”

After flying off course for a couple of minutes, the plane headed back towards its original north-easterly track. I recorded as follows:

“It’s now dropping away, right below us. It appears in fact to be moving at speed and it’s rising.

“It’s coming straight back up towards us again. It seems to be coming straight towards us.

“It’s getting a little bit brighter ... it’s just difficult to say, in fact, well, to gauge the movement of the object because the aircraft itself is moving over the sky ... it’s now dropping right away behind us.

“The light that is coming out from it, through the reflection of the window here, is probably about twice the apparent length of the object.”

It was during this part of the flight, as the aircraft headed back towards Kaikoura East, that David captured a larger image on film that was to feature on the news item that went around the world. Later analysis of the film showed that the image was out of focus, although at the time David believed he had the correct focus. It was, he said, the most fantastic thing he had ever seen through a camera lens. This was my reaction at the time:

“As I told you before, the object appeared to be like a flying saucer.

“Well, the cameraman now says that through the lens it now appears it’s an oval-shaped object with rings of light going around.

“So, that’s an oval-shaped object with rings of light. This is the colour that you see it through the camera, a sort of grey-white colour.”

During the left turn back towards Kaikoura East, Bill saw what seemed to him at the time to be the same object ahead of and above the aircraft. He saw this object travel quickly downward and to the left of the aircraft. He had the impression that the plane might have actually flown over it. Apparently this was a second object because those of us watching the light out to the right-hand side did not see it move to the front or left of the plane. I remember the object out to the right moving below us and then disappearing beneath the right-hand side of the aircraft at considerable speed. I recall pressing my face hard against the window and watching it go out of sight. I do not think we

saw that particular object again.

Later, when I interviewed Bill, he made special reference to the object that passed to the left of the aircraft. According to Bill it could not have been Venus, or any other astronomical body, because “the planet Venus does not sort of pass beneath our aircraft ... we weren’t that high up in space.”

We were now heading towards the coast and although Bill did not mention it at the time, he continued to pick up radar returns, some of which confirmed visual sightings and targets being picked up by Wellington radar.

PLANE: Do you have any targets in our vicinity at the moment?

RADAR: Not in your vicinity at the moment. The nearest one would be at 10 o’clock at 20 miles just off the coast, about six miles north of Kaikoura.

PLANE: Roger. Thanks. [Pause.]

RADAR: The target previously mentioned is still off the coast north of Kaikoura at 9.30 to you at 16 miles.

PLANE: Roger. Thanks.

RADAR: The most consistent and interesting target I’ve been observing for the last 20 minutes is about 10 miles south of Kames and slowly moving north. It’s moved about 10 miles in that time but has been showing consistently on radar. I’ll keep you advised as you get closer.

Geoff Cause then passed on the weather conditions at Blenheim before continuing with reports of targets.

RADAR: I’ve got you [the plane] at nine o’clock to that target north of Kaikoura.

PLANE: Roger.

RADAR: Sierra Alpha Echo, two targets at 11 o’clock at 15 miles.

PLANE: Roger. We don’t appear to be picking it up quite so easily on this leg. We had them very bright southbound, but they seem to be a little less active, visually, anyway.

RADAR: Are you flying in good visual met conditions?

PLANE: Affirmative. It’s been CAV [ceiling and visibility unlimited] okay all the way.

RADAR: Another target now at nine o'clock at eight miles.

Bill told me later that he had decided to keep silent about the targets during the latter part of the journey because he believed that all on board had just about had enough of UFOs by that stage. Bill, you were so right, as one of my final taped segments confirms:

"We've now just passed Kaikoura and there's been no further activity. There are pinpoints of light in the sky, but nothing has been confirmed on radar.

"I, for one, am hoping that the rest of the journey will be uneventful. I think I've just about had enough of UFOs for one night."

But there was more to come!

"It's about 30 seconds after that last message and, of course, we've got another one, right in front of us ... very bright ... it seems to be quite a long way away.

"And another one just flashed to the left of it. That one flashed extremely brightly.

"They have both now faded ... the other one is flashing again ... it's giving off an orange flashing light.

"It looks like an aircraft beacon ... it's moving off. It's extremely bright ... it has faded and dropped!

"It seems to have just dropped at an incredible speed and it seems to be rolling and turning! In fact there's one light and another light beside it ... oh, I don't know ... I really don't know what is going on.

" It appears to be over the hills … there appears to be a whole cluster of them in fact.

"You can see the orange and red among the lights. There's one particular one that keeps flashing to the right-hand side of … you can see three distinct lights.

"In fact it looks very much like the pattern we saw when we came down over the Kaikoura coast on the way down, but there wasn't quite as much flashing. It really is quite strange."

At the same time, the flight crew called up Wellington radar.

PLANE: Wellington, do you have [anything] in my 12 o'clock position,

probably somewhere near Grassmere, or perhaps a little east of Grassmere?

RADAR: Affirmative. I have a strong target at 12 o'clock to you at 20 miles and that's two miles off the coast, 10 miles south of Cape Campbell.

PLANE: Roger, we have that one also and quite a good visual display at the moment
RADAR: It's showing lights?
PLANE: Say again.
RADAR: It's showing lights, is it?

PLANE: Affirmative. It looks like a collection of lights. I wonder can you establish and ask the flight service man [at Blenheim] to turn off his rotary beacon just in case we're mixing it up with that.

Geoff Causer then phoned Blenheim and asked them to switch off their beacon. About the same time the main flashing light disappeared; however, I discovered later that the Blenheim beacon would have been about 50 miles from the plane at the time and most likely obscured by clouds and a mountain ridge. The fact that the flashing light went out about the same time as the beacon was turned off seems to have been a coincidence. I do not believe anyone has yet invented a beacon capable of suddenly appearing in the sky, falling at an incredible speed, and then settling into a rolling and turning pattern.

The single most brilliant display was yet to come. We were approaching Cape Campbell when suddenly I saw a huge, bright light blossom into view. I pointed it out to David and he was preparing to film it when the plane went into a turn. The turn was necessary because the aircraft was too high to make the proper approach to Blenheim. By the time we had completed the orbit the object was no longer visible. But let me tell you about it. It appeared to be high above the lights of Blenheim and it was hypnotically beautiful. I remember having to crouch to look up at it. It was more orange in colour than the other objects we had seen and it had a definite red tinge. Maybe it was Vern Powell's companion paying us a courtesy call. It was an incredible finale to an unbelievable couple of hours.

About this time Bob Guard pointed out Venus and a number of lights on the surface of the water. They were very dim and were partly obscured by cloud. Bill Startup reported the lights to Wellington Radar.

PLANE: [There] appears to be a large number of small boats, [I don't know] whether there's a fleet going through or not, but there appears to be upwards of 20 lights on our starboard side. But they all appear to be on the surface and they all appear to be fairly dim, but [there is] definitely a large number there.

RADAR: Roger. I've got just one paint, three o'clock to you at 15 miles.

PLANE: Roger. Sounds like some of the lights we can see. [There] would be upwards of 20 lights scattered about all through the strait [Cook Strait].

RADAR: Right ... [pause] ... are you ready for descent?
PLANE: Affirmative.

About 10 minutes later we landed and for the second time that morning, Mother Earth felt good. Before I leave that return journey, I must mention a strange and somewhat disturbing incident that occurred shortly after we turned back towards the coast following Bill Startup's little "test." There was a temporary lull in the activity. Suddenly I became aware of the light shining on the stairs from the cargo area below. For most of the trip we had the lights out on the flight deck but this was the first time I had really noticed the light from the stairwell, although it must have provided most of our illumination throughout the flight. At the same time I became aware of a presence, and not a particularly nice presence at that. It made me feel vulnerable and uncomfortable. I turned to look towards the stairway and, as I did, Dennis turned as well. I should point out that Dennis was to the left of me and slightly in front. I do not think he could have seen me turning, although I cannot be sure. Our eyes met as we turned but we did not say anything. I do not think we needed to. Although I never discussed the incident with Dennis, because in retrospect it seemed a little silly, Sue told me later that Dennis did mention it to her. He also felt there was something on board the aircraft, something strange.

I did not give the incident much thought until about two months later, although I did get my feelings down in writing while the incident was still fresh in my mind. Unknown to me, Dr Bruce Maccabee, the American scientist who was then investigating our case, had also discovered something strange about that particular segment of the trip. By this stage he had interviewed all of those on board the Argosy and they had given him varying estimates of the time the aircraft had been flying south-east, instead of north-

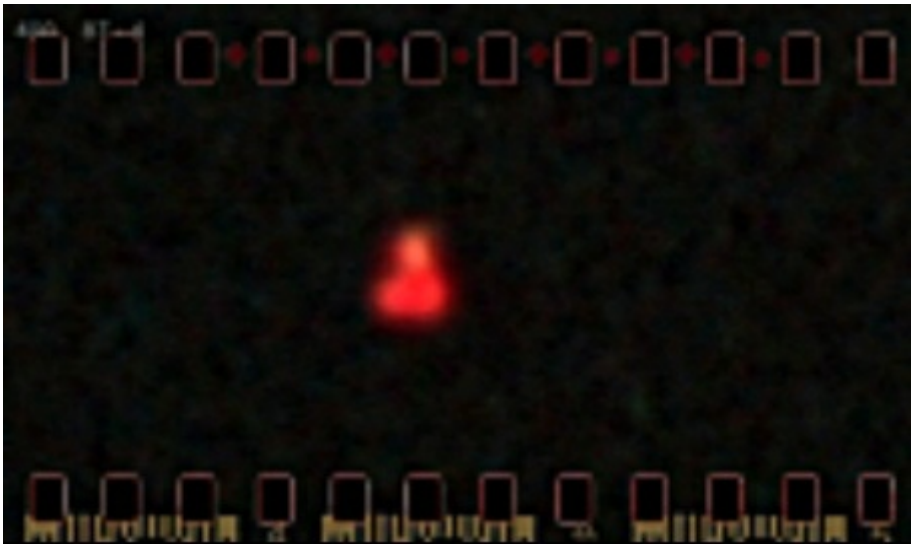
east. These estimates ranged from three to five minutes. I have since timed my taped commentary from the point when I said we were heading towards the object until just after we had apparently completed our left turn back to the north-easterly course. This segment runs for about three minutes. So, at a conservative estimate, we must have been off course for at least three minutes.

But, as Maccabee discovered, by comparing the Wellington radar tape with my tape, there is a time discrepancy. A conversation on the Wellington tape indicates that the plane was back on course within one minute of the time it turned right. Although Maccabee thinks that the Wellington controller may have been in error in his recollection of the events, the Wellington tape conversation between Geoff Causer and the Christchurch operator certainly seems to suggest the plane was off its north-easterly track for only a short time. Thus, a straightforward interpretation of the Wellington tape, when combined with my own, suggests a “time discrepancy” during which everyone on board had one minute of their lives “stretched” into two or three minutes.

As I mentioned earlier I wrote about the “presence” soon after the flight, in fact in the first couple of weeks. I had not shown that particular segment to anyone apart from my wife and a couple of close friends. I certainly had not told Leonard Lee or Bruce Maccabee about my uneasy feelings. But, about two months later I learned that Maccabee had discovered the time discrepancy. Lee told me about it soon after he spoke to Maccabee on the telephone and I must admit I felt a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. I remember going across to my briefcase and taking out the rough book draft I had written and reading the relevant segment to Lee. He, like me, was completely bewildered by the apparent coincidence. Maybe a mundane explanation will be found one day. But, at the time of writing, the incident remained a disturbing mystery.

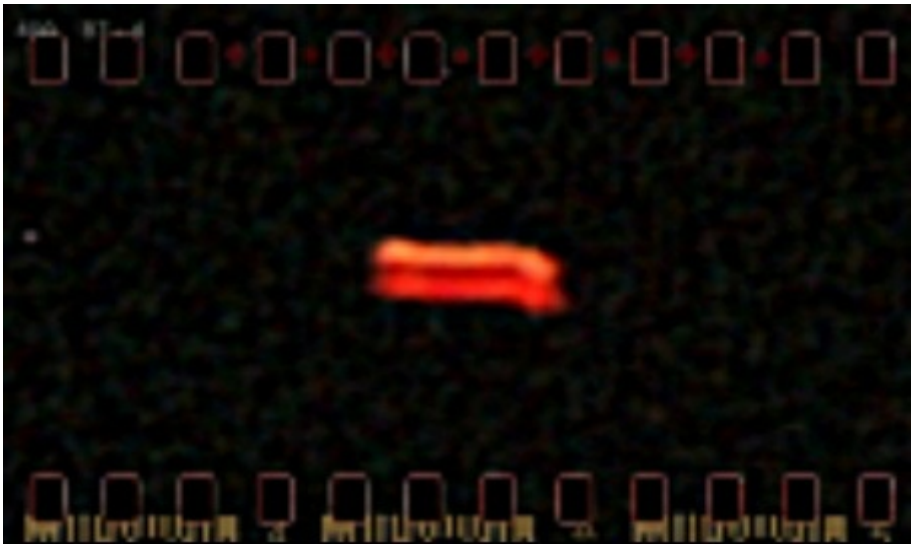
Triangular Configuration

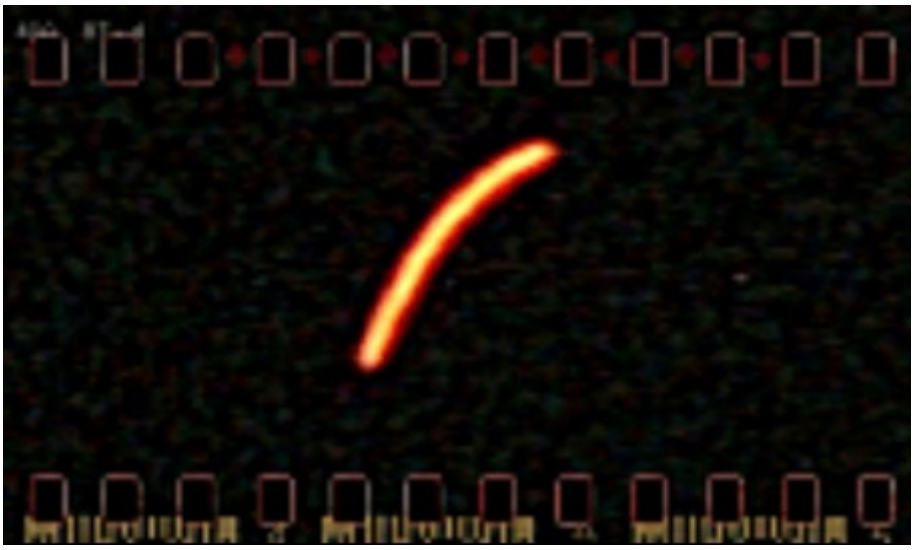
The following images were captured at the time the author was describing an object that fell a considerable distance and then settled into a rolling and turning pattern.



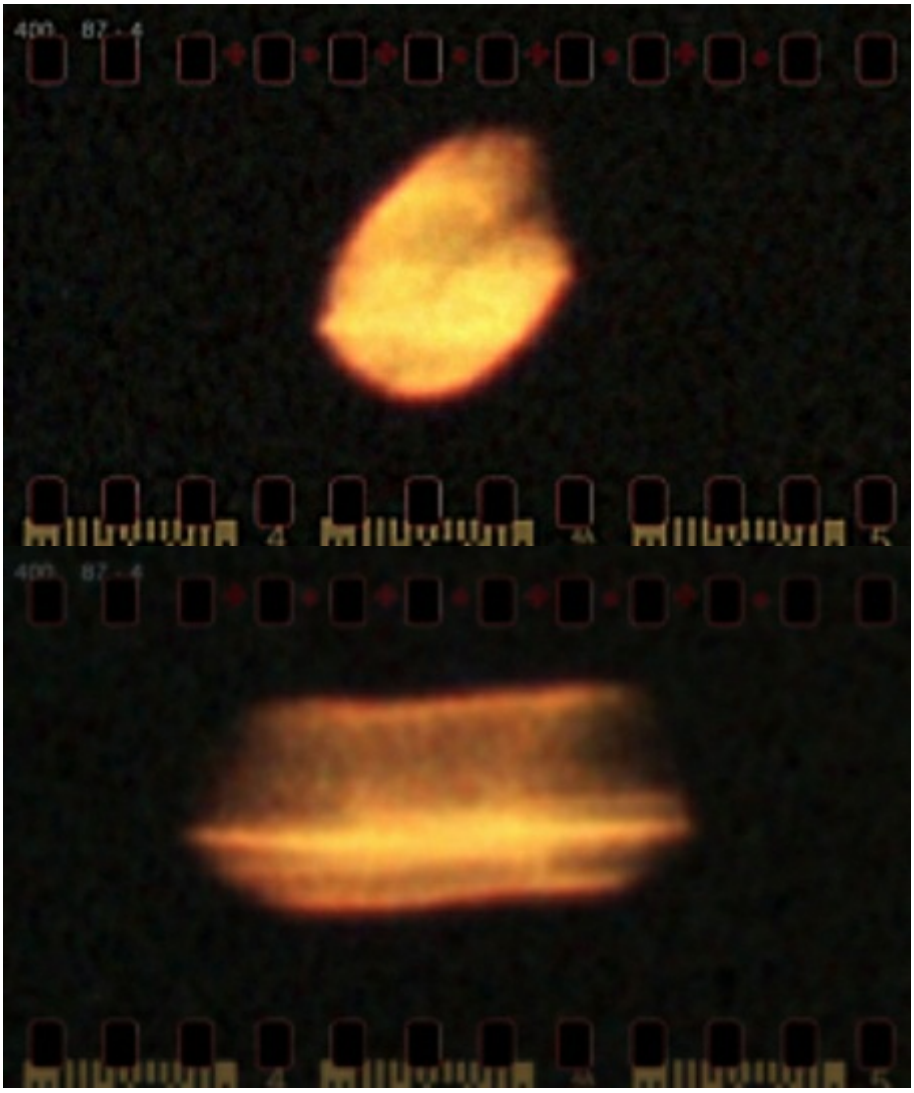
The first image shows the triangular configuration, with its vivid orange and red colour, that appears in the latter part of the film.

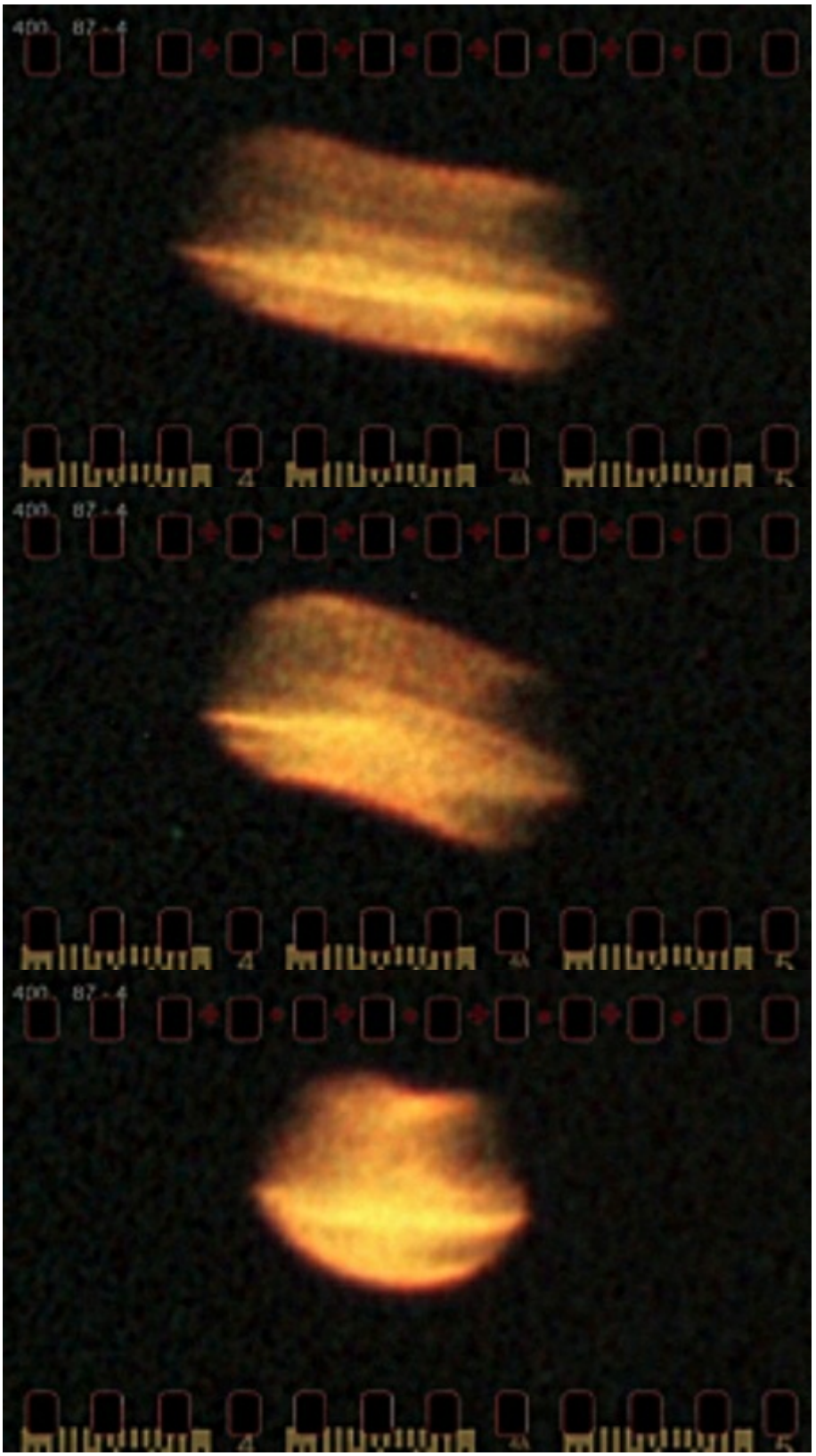
The following three images show the same triangular configuration; only this time the image has been streaked due either to movement either of the camera or the object itself.





Frame by frame sequence, finishing with the classic saucer shape.




400 87-4
400 87-4
400 87-4

Chapter 5: Cloak and Dagger Stuff

It was now just before 3.30 on the morning of 31 December and we were back in the offices of Safe Air where, only six hours earlier, we had met our crew for the first time. Those few hours seemed like a lifetime. Dennis made a beeline for the telephone to get his boss out of bed with the news of our adventures. It was a pretty frustrating time for Dennis because although he had been up there when it was all happening, he did not have any film. He offered me the chance to get my film processed at his channel's Wellington office later that morning, with the proviso that he would get the first bite at the cherry. As I said earlier, my friend Dennis is a persistent sort of chap. But this time I gave him a firm no. I was now fully aware that I had a world scoop on my hands and I had no intention of sharing it with anyone else, apart from Channel O of course.

Now that we were safely on the ground and had our film the can, we should have begun to relax. But that was not to be the case. Both David and I were starting to get slightly uneasy. We had discussed the possibility, half-jokingly, that maybe there was absolutely nothing on the film and that the objects had been playing games with us. Maybe they could be seen but not filmed? After all, they had done some strange disappearing acts both visually and on radar.

David's uneasiness increased when he returned to the aircraft to pick up his gear. He was alone and, as he walked across the darkened tarmac, he suddenly noticed a bright light in the sky. For a moment he was fearful that he was about to be paid a visit and possibly relieved of his film. I experienced much the same feeling as we drove down a darkened country road to Bill's house. I remember looking up at the starlit sky and thinking I would not be at all surprised if the car engine suddenly stopped and one of our friends up there dropped in on us and asked for the film. Although our fears proved unfounded, I believe that after what we had been through our feelings of uneasiness were very understandable.

By 4.30 am David and I were sitting in Bill's living room tucking into a couple of brandies and trying to come to terms with our incredible experience. Dennis was no longer with us. He was staying with one of the Safe Air officers who was on duty when we touched down. Gradually the brandy and the lateness of the hour began to work their way through my system and I began to slow down. But the peace was not to last for long. Just before dawn I was jolted back into the heart-pounding, adrenalin-flowing world. Bill had gone off to the local police station to find out if anyone had reported bright lights in the sky that might have corresponded with out sightings. His wife, Shirley, who admitted a great interest in UFOs and related phenomena, was looking after us very well and there was a never-ending supply of tea and things to eat. She was fascinated by our story and I added to her interest by playing my taped commentary.

The three of us were sitting in the living room when suddenly we all noticed a shadowy figure pass by the glass doors, apparently along a path at the side of the house. I went outside and walked around the house but there was no one there. David immediately rushed into the bedroom where he had stored his gear to make sure the film was still there. Maybe, as we all agreed later, the shadowy figure was just a reflection, maybe even a car light throwing shadows along the side of the house. Who knows?

It was about this time that I decided I should tell someone from the channel what had happened, so I put a call through to Neil Miller at his home in Melbourne It was about 2.30 am Australian time and it was a very sleepy and disbelieving chief of staff who answered the telephone. It took me quite a while to convince him that I was not pulling his leg. He asked whether I wanted to air freight the film back or return with it myself. I told him there was no way in the world I was going to entrust the film to any cargo service and I said I would deliver it personally. I arranged to call him back at a more respectable hour and left him to get on with his sleeping.

We watched the dawn break and I then began to think about how we were going to get back to Christchurch. I wanted to travel via the Kaikoura coast to see if there were any witnesses to the light show we had seen near the town only a few hours before. I thought a couple of independent eyewitness accounts would round off the story nicely. I decided that Ngaire should hire a car and drive to Kaikoura where we would meet her. Shirley Startup offered

to drive David and me to Kaikoura where we were to meet Ngaire at the town's post office about midday and, after doing some filming, continue on to Christchurch.

Before leaving Blenheim we decided to share our story with four people who had all played a part in making those incredible few hours possible. First we called on Vern and Ngaire Powell who were amazed and elated that we had actually seen something, and, what is more important, that we had captured it on film. I played them the taped commentary, which added to their astonishment. Next we went to the home of Safe Air's operations manager, Jim Howard, who had made the whole trip possible. Jim and Noelene, too, were just as fascinated by our story.

Then it was time for David and me to leave and we set off for Kaikoura with Shirley at the wheel. Throughout the journey we listened to the radio news broadcasts but it was not until we had almost reached our destination that the first sketchy reports of our exploits began to get to air. By the time we reached Kaikoura, one Christchurch station, Radio Avon, was going big on the story. I used to work for Avon, so I rang to tell them exactly what had happened.

We arrived at the post office about half an hour earlier than expected and I decided to make a few inquiries while we were waiting for Ngaire. First I went to the local police station to see whether anyone had reported any unusual lights in the sky. No one was there so I went to the local telephone exchange, thinking that if there had been any news of UFOs in the town overnight, the operators might have heard something. But they had not heard anything.

By this stage the lack of sleep was really catching up on me and I was fast losing interest in taking the story any further. My overwhelming desire was to get to Christchurch and to climb into a big, soft, warm bed. Also, I realised that probably very few people would have been up and about at the time of our sightings, which began just after midnight and continued until about 3.00 am. Nevertheless, I decided that since we were in the town it was probably worth making a few more inquiries. So I knocked on several doors and called at the local motor camp, but again no one had seen anything. They confessed they were either asleep or drunk at the time. Ngaire had now arrived and after a short discussion we decided against any further filming.

We said goodbye to Shirley Startup, thanked her for her kindness, and headed down the coastal highway. Throughout the journey Radio Avon gave the story airplay and it had also been picked up by the national program, Radio New Zealand. It was exciting to realise that I was part of such an incredible event but my main concern at the time was trying to keep my eyes open to ensure that I did not run off the road or become entangled with various gangs of motorcyclists heading down the highway to a convention in Christchurch.

We arrived in Christchurch at about 4.30 pm and there was a message for me at the Grants to call Channel O. Neil Miller, who was now fully awake and obviously excited about the events of the past few hours, said he wanted me back in Melbourne that night. I pointed out that I had already booked myself on a flight the following afternoon and that I was hoping to get a good night's sleep. But Miller was insistent and at one stage he even considered hiring a Learjet, which would have cost the channel about $6500, so obviously they were very interested.

The story had now gone worldwide and Miller told me he was afraid the New Zealand authorities might try to confiscate the film in the interests of national security. He said he wanted me "out of there," meaning the Grant's place, and safely ensconced elsewhere. In other words, he wanted me "in hiding." I thought the whole thing was beginning to get rather melodramatic and I said I was staying put. However, I did make one concession to his wishes. I took the film around to the Crocketts' motel and handed it to David for safekeeping. I was fairly certain that very few people knew where they were staying. I really did not believe there was much point in all the cloak and dagger stuff because if the authorities wanted to apprehend me all they had to do was to wait for me at the airport.

Meanwhile, the channel had booked me on a flight leaving Christchurch at 10.15 pm. Miller assured me there would be a pre-paid ticket waiting for me at the airport and said the channel would fly me back to New Zealand once the story had gone to air so that I could continue my holiday. I said goodbye to my boys, who could not quite work out why Daddy kept going away all the time, and promised I would be back soon.

Sue drove me to the airport and for the second time in less than 24 hours we were saying goodbye at the same airport. I went to the counter to pick up my pre-paid ticket but was informed that it had not arrived and that I would have

to use the return half of my own ticket. Apparently the channel had not managed to arrange payment. I was not too worried because I was sure there would be no problems getting everything sorted out once I was back in Melbourne. The fears of those at the channel who thought I might be waylaid by the authorities proved unfounded and, after kissing Sue goodbye with the promise that I would be back in a couple of days, I boarded my Air New Zealand DC10. It was less than two hours to the dawning of 1979.

As the aircraft taxied towards the take-off area, a hostess came up and informed me that the captain would like me to be his guest on the flight deck after take-off. I thanked her and asked if she could request one favour of the captain. If he saw anything unusual on take-off (meaning UFOs or bright lights in the sky) could he let me know? After all, I thought, they might have turned up to see me safely on my way!

A minute or so later the hostess returned and said that if I wished I could join the captain on the flight deck for take-off. I was up the aisle in a flash. I was quickly introduced to the crew and I strapped myself in behind the captain. That was a take-off I will remember for a long time. Although we saw nothing unusual as we climbed out of Christchurch, I was soon talking about UFOs with the crew. They presented themselves as open-minded sceptics although when I mentioned Bill Startup, the captain seemed quite impressed. Evidently he knew Bill and thought highly of him. I would like to think that I left the crew slightly less sceptical and more open-minded.

The cabin crew were also very interested in the story and I spent most of the flight across the Tasman Sea in the first class area relating what had happened and drinking French champagne. It was a very enjoyable flight. Incidentally, I celebrated two New Year's Eves that night. Australia is two hours behind New Zealand time and I welcomed in the New Zealand version of 1979 while we were still in the air. My second "celebration" was spent in a line waiting to go through customs formalities at Melbourne Airport.

Later I was to discover that the pilot was Captain Jim Collins. On 28 November 1980, Captain Collins was in command of an Air New Zealand DC10 that slammed into Mount Erebus in the Antarctic. All 257 passengers and crew perished.

Chapter 6: On the Up, Going Down

Several of my workmates were at the airport to meet me and had arranged for me to be smuggled out through a side door. I was not sure whether they were worried about me doing a moonlight flit with the film, or whether they wanted to protect me from the attention of other members of the news media. Although I did not really think their action was necessary, I was enjoying all the star treatment.

We headed off across town through the New Year traffic. Also in the car was a reporter from the British Broadcasting Corporation who had flown down from his Sydney office a short time before my flight had arrived. His bosses were keen on the story and he intended to work through the night to get a report off to them by satellite. We toasted the New Year in typical Australian fashion by passing around a couple of bottles of cold beer.

On that trip, a friend and colleague suggested that before I handed over the film I should seek some sort of assurance, either about copyright or payment. I had already come to much the same conclusion. I realised that the 400 feet of film I had in my hands might be worth an awful lot of money and I felt I deserved suitable reward for my efforts in gathering it. Up until that time I had paid for nearly all of the costs involved, including my own air travel back to Australia, and I had used up all of my holiday pay and some extra money I had deposited in a New Zealand bank account for emergencies. At the very least I felt had a strong financial hold on the film and I thought that might also give me some rights to the copyright. I had also agreed with the Crocketts to try to negotiate a generous agreement on their behalf. In fact David had been reluctant to part with the film until such an agreement could be worked out. I told him that I would share any payment with him on a 50-50 basis.

On my arrival at the channel another colleague took me aside and also suggested I should claim the copyright of the film on behalf of the film crew and myself. All of this put me in a difficult position. I was extremely tired

and slightly overwhelmed by everything that had happened to me. I certainly was not in the ideal frame of mind to make a value judgement on such an important issue as the copyright of the film. Unfortunately it was the dead of the night and there was no one I could contact for professional advice. I decided to go ahead and claim the film and images as mine. I now believe that was a mistake.

Most of my workmates and their families had gathered at the office to celebrate the New Year and to welcome me back. As I walked through the door with the film held high, there was a great cheer. The most important task now was to get the film processed but, before I handed it over, I sought an assurance from a junior executive that the film and the images were mine. He agreed, so I gave the film to the processing laboratory and went back to the newsroom to join in the celebrations with my colleagues.

A short time later the film was ready. Although there were about 20 people in the newsroom, I asked that only two come into the editing room for the preview. I did not want an audience if it turned out that we had a fizzer. The first reel was the southbound trip and although I knew that David had some difficulty in filming, I was bitterly disappointed with the results. We could not see the lights above Kaikoura or, for that matter, any bright objects in the sky. There was one blue-coloured object in frame for a short time but we hardly gave it a second glance. We were looking for that incredible light show I knew we had seen, but it was not there. My heart sank. God, I thought, if there is nothing better on the second roll, I am going to look the biggest Charlie ever born.

A few minutes later, the second roll — the return trip to Blenheim — was ready. The film editor laced it up and we ran it through. The first run did very little to ease that gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach that told me we had blown it. Sure, there were some lights but they were dancing around everywhere because of camera movement. But then the editor began to play the film frame by frame and it was then I realised we had something! I watched the small viewing screen with fascination as the light suddenly grew in size to a huge beach-ball shaped object and then, just as suddenly, reduced to a smaller object that looked remarkably like an acorn. There were more bright lights towards the end of the film but it was the big object that had caught our attention. There it was, just as David had described it. We had no

idea what it was but we did know that it was unidentified, that it was airborne, which as far as we were concerned meant it was flying, and it was an object. It satisfied all the criteria. We had a UFO!

I remember someone in the editing room asking, “Have we got a story?” “Yes,” I replied, “we certainly have.”

I then ran out into the newsroom where everyone was waiting for the news and screamed – a scream of relief and joy. The place erupted and everyone wanted to see the film. They all crowded into the editing room and watched what David Crockett had captured on film 24 hours earlier. Poor old David, I thought. There he was back in New Zealand, wondering whether or not he had the film of a lifetime. I wished he could have been there to share that moment with me.

Next came the hardest part of the exercise, getting the bloody thing to air. We had three separate items to prepare; one for our own news, one for the BBC and one for the American CBS network. Both the British and American segments had to be ready by early morning for satellite transmission. The BBC item was a breeze. Their reporter had to do all the work. My contribution was a short studio interview. The items for CBS and our news were a different matter. I sat down at a typewriter and tried to write the scripts but the lack of sleep and the New Year alcohol were catching up on me. My powers of concentration were fading fast. I managed to type several paragraphs but I realised I was not going to get it done by myself. Leonard Lee, who by this stage was firmly in control of the production, took over, although I went over the scripts and made alterations here and there. Those few hours were the longest and most exhausting of my life.

The next problem was to get myself looking presentable for the television cameras. I walked through the building to the dressing room to have a shower and a shave. I locked the door and lathered my face. Suddenly the lack of sleep and the events of the past 48 hours hit me like a sledgehammer. I felt myself going. I began to lose my balance. A huge wave of nausea travelled up my spine, over the back of my head to my forehead. It came in waves and physically shook my whole body. I thought my head was going to explode. I braced myself against the washbasin and placed my left leg behind me, up against the wall. Even then, I kept falling towards the mirror. I managed to shave, in a fashion, but I decided to give the shower a miss in case I fell and

cracked my head. I made it back to the newsroom by leaning against the wall and sliding myself along, but I had to enlist the help of a couple of people to get to the studios. I put my arms around their shoulders and they supported and half-carried me to the studio desk.

There was very little difference between the CBS item and the segment for Channel O's news and all I had to do was sit there and read the script from the auto-cue. I had no problems with the CBS item but by the time we got to the local segment I was so tired that I had difficulty reading the auto-cue and also following Lee's instructions from the control room. However, I persevered and finally everything was on tape. Now my overwhelming desire was to get some sleep and I was helped back to an office where two couches had been pulled together to form a bed.

It was now about 8.00 am and I had been awake for 50 hours. I thought I would sleep forever and a day, but two and a half hours later I was awake. For a moment I had no idea where I was but then the memories of the past few hours came flooding back. Although the short sleep had not really cleared the cobwebs from my brain, it had helped sweep out a few nooks and crannies.

My main concern now was the copyright of the film and I knew I would need some legal advice. I was having second thoughts about my decision to claim the copyright and I realised that the person who had given me the assurance probably did not have the authority to make that sort of decision. Unfortunately I did not have a lawyer and I began to go through the phone book in a desperate attempt to get hold of someone. I was looking for the names of those lawyers who had impressed me in the numerous court cases I had covered as a reporter. But I had no luck at all. They were either away on holiday or the field of copyright was not their particular forte. I wandered out into the newsroom and asked some of my colleagues if they knew of a suitable legal adviser. Finally someone suggested a name and I called him. I explained what had happened to date and he told me he would make some inquiries and asked me to call him back that night. He seemed fairly confident that I had some sort of case for copyright and I felt a lot better after I had spoken to him. I then set about doing all the things that had to be done. The list was enormous.

It seemed as though half of the world's news media called the channel that

day and the local press was also out at the studios in force. In between phone calls and interviews I was trying to help with the preparation of a half-hour documentary that was to go to air that night following the news. Once again I had very little to do with the finished product. Lee did most of the work and my main job was to sit in the studio and read the script he had written. The channel also featured some rather dramatic news promos that day which billed my experience as the “closest encounter.” By now I had reverted to being a mere spectator and I just sat back and watched. At that stage I was no more capable of putting together a half-hour documentary than flying to the moon.

In the light of the subsequent criticisms of the programs that went to air that day I wish I had played a bigger part in their production. The feeling among my friends and colleagues was that the programs were over-dramatised, which was unnecessary since the story was dramatic enough in itself. There were, however, some completely justified criticism of the use of freeze-frames from the film and the editing of highlights from my taped commentary. Both are legitimate techniques in television production but unfortunately we did not explain to the general public what we were doing. It was an innocent mistake but it should not have happened. Many people believed that the slowed-down version of the film and the freeze-frame sequences were indicative of the actual movements of the lights. The object that we concentrated on in the programs, the one filmed as we headed out of Christchurch, appeared to us on board the Argosy as a steady, bright light. There was some apparent movement as we turned towards it and also when we turned away, but that might have been an illusion created by the movement of the aircraft. The main reason for slowing down the film frame by frame was to counter camera movement. If we had not done this, the film would have meant nothing to the viewers. They would have been treated to a spectacle of dancing lights and not much else. Certainly, the definite shape of the object would not have been apparent.

There was also criticism that we showed only highlights of the film which ran for a total of about seven minutes. That is one criticism I do not feel is justified because anyone with any knowledge of television news would know that you do not normally show all the film you shoot. Stories, even a world scoop, have to be condensed and a fair proportion of the film has to be

thrown away because it is simply not suitable for transmission. This can be for a number of reasons, such as camera movement or bad framing. Much of David's film showed only the blackness of the early morning sky. We could not show that, so we picked out what we thought were the best segments and single frames and screened them. That was our job as television journalists.

As far as my taped commentary was concerned, there were two major faults in the way it was presented. To start with, the segments from both the downward and return journeys were mixed up which destroyed the continuity. I supervised the editing of the tapes and made sure they were in order. But as I have already mentioned, I had very little to do with the final product that went to air and the tapes did become mixed.

In addition, the items gave the impression that I was describing exactly what was being shown on the screen. That was not the case. Most news film is shot single-system, which means that the sound is recorded on a magnetic strip on the film itself. But since we were shooting double-system, the film was mute and the sound was recorded separately on tape. Normally the vision and audio are synchronised with the use of a slate board that has a clapper on top; the sound of the clapper is recorded on the tape and the film shows the clapper striking. Later, when the item is being put together, the film editor synchronises the sound of the clapper with the frame showing the clapper striking the slate board. But because of the circumstances under which we were filming, it would not have been feasible to try to synchronise every piece of film with what I was saying. David needed the freedom to film immediately something appeared, without having to wait for the slate board to be marked up with the take and shot numbers. I also needed the freedom to record my commentary as the events occurred outside the Argosy's windows.

Unfortunately the items that went to air gave the impression that I was describing exactly what was being shown on film. Maybe we should have mentioned that the commentary, although recorded at the same time as the film was shot, did not always match the pictures. It is of course easy to be wise after the event and no doubt if we were given the chance all over again, we would tackle the story differently.

Gradually the day wore on and it was news time. Christ, I thought, as I watched the newsroom monitor, I look haggard. Then the documentary went to air. As the closing credits rolled the channel's general manager, Max

Stuart, who was at home over the Christmas break, called up to offer his congratulations. Lee suggested that maybe he should open up the boardroom liquor cabinet to all of those who had worked so hard and so long on the programs. Stuart agreed and everyone headed off to “mahogany row” where we began to make short work of the executives’ alcohol supply.

It was during this boardroom session that I got a taste of the nasty things just around the corner. The phone rang and it was a Japanese television network wanting to buy our news footage. Neil Miller took the call and, naturally, because I now thought I held the copyright I was eager to hear what sort of price they were willing to pay. I was amazed when Miller told the Japanese that the Americans and the British had paid about $5000 each for the item. I said I thought that was far too little for such an important piece of film. Miller was uncertain what he should do so he called over Peter Hanrahan, the station’s executive news producer. When Hanrahan heard that Miller had already shown his hand, he said there was now no way we could ask for any more. So Miller agreed on a similar figure for the Japanese and hung up.

By now I was fortified with alcohol and angry that such a unique piece of film was being sold for a song. I was waiting for someone on whom to vent my anger when the phone rang again. It was Leonard Lee. I knew that he had been responsible for selling the items to Britain and America and I decided to blow my stack at him. I took the phone from Miller and away I went. When I had finished I rather petulantly threw the phone down on to a desk and walked away. I thought Lee had made the call from his home but I soon discovered otherwise. The door burst open and Lee stood there, shaking with rage. He had made the call from the newsroom and had lost no time in getting around to see me. It was a pretty bizarre scene. Here we were, two friends of long-standing, shouting at each other at the tops of our voices. I was quite convinced there was going to be a physical confrontation and I was getting worried because I knew I was in no condition to fight anyone. By now, Lee was letting me know in no uncertain terms that he was not very happy with me. He said he was sick of the way I had been “strutting” around the office all day. I must admit I had certainly enjoyed all the attention and maybe I was even guilty of strutting. But I think most people would have acted in much the same way if they had been in my position.

Then Miller joined in the verbal barrage and I started to look for a way out.

Everything was getting too much for me to handle. Hanrahan, a peaceful sort of bloke, was doing his best to act as a mediator, and gradually things began to settle down but not before Lee let me know the real reason for his anger. He pointed his finger at me and shouted: “It was my idea, it was my idea!” I could not work out at the time what he meant by the claim that it was his idea, but later I learned that he had tried to travel to New Zealand to do the story but had been turned down because I was already there. The channel thought it would be far more economical to get me to chase up the story and, before going on holidays, I had told Miller I would be available if anything major came up.

Although Hanrahan had managed to take some of the sting out of the air, the atmosphere in the boardroom was still tense. I decided the best way to extricate myself was simply to walk out. So I did. My main concern was the film that I knew was still sitting on a machine in the editing room. I walked through the building to the now deserted newsroom and put the film into my bag. The scene in the boardroom had left me unnerved and I was fearful that someone at the channel might track me down and take the film from me. So, rather than go home, I decided to go to Steve Levitt’s home. Steve was a cameraman at the channel and in the short time we had known each other we had become good friends. I knew I would get a sympathetic ear at the Levitt’s’ and that was what I needed at that moment.

We sat up for a long time that night discussing what I should do. Finally, Steve came up with the best suggestion to date. He said there was no point in worrying about the situation any more that night as it was obvious I needed some sleep. He said I should call a senior executive in the morning, tell him exactly what had happened, and see what could be worked out to everyone’s benefit. I crawled off to bed feeling mentally battered and bruised. For a short time I had been on top of the world. Now I tossed and turned, trying to work out what the hell had gone wrong.

Chapter 7: Down and Out

The next morning, 2 January, I phoned a senior executive at his home and arranged a meeting at the channel later that morning. On legal advice I am unable to provide details of what occurred. However, I can say that when I left the meeting I was convinced that copyright to the film was mine. Later the channel was to deny that any such agreement had been reached.

After the meeting I took the original film to a nearby laboratory to have a copy made in case the original was damaged from too much handling. When I returned to the channel, about half past two in the afternoon, I was confident that everything had been resolved satisfactorily. I had no idea that my world was about to fall apart and within an hour I would no longer care about UFOs, money or agreements. In fact, I really did not want very much to do with life itself.

By now Miller and Lee had decided that the events of the previous night were best forgotten and we agreed that our disagreement was mainly the result of too little sleep and too much alcohol. To all intents and purposes we were friends again. The main task we now faced was to get a secondary documentary together for that night and also to produce another news item. Lee, as I mentioned earlier, had taken over the production side of things and he wanted to talk to me about my role in the two programs. Before we could get that done, however, there was a phone call from a senior channel executive. He was on holidays and had rung to offer his congratulations. He was full of praise for a job well done and it was a friendly and amiable conversation until I mentioned the copyright agreement I had worked out a little earlier. The call suddenly went sour. He told me I had no right to the film and he indicated that if I intended to pursue the matter then I would most likely end up in court. It was also hinted very strongly that I would never again work in television in Australia.

My thin veneer of control, battered by lack of sleep and the events of the past two days, began to crumble. I put down the phone, knowing full well that

something was very wrong. I was beginning to panic and I could feel my control slipping away. I did not know what to do. In a daze, I found myself in an office talking to Lee who had no idea how I felt. I sat there, totally confused, not knowing which way to turn. Then Lee started talking about the programs he was putting together for that night and what my role would be. By this time I was well aware there was absolutely no way that I would be able to take part. I wanted out. I needed a quiet, safe refuge from all the pressures, somewhere well away from Channel O and UFOs. I remember telling Lee that I would not be going on air and I tried to explain that I was having serious problems. The conversation somehow got around to the phone calls that had been coming into the office. I asked Lee what he was referring to and, although at first he was reluctant, he finally told me. Evidently one caller had said that I would be dead within two days. Normally I would have dismissed that sort of call as the work of a crank, but this was not a normal situation, far from it.

As soon as I heard “dead within two days” I felt an incredible sense of dread. I broke down and wept. Lee became the focal point of my paranoia and panic. In my mind he became the crank caller and I was desperately afraid of him. I needed somebody else to talk to. I asked Lee to get Steve Levitt, who had once been a psychiatric nurse. I felt he was my only hope. Lee left, probably wondering what the hell was going on and what he had said or done to get me into such a state. Steve came in and over the next hour or so he talked me back from the brink. He allowed me to cry and then, when I needed it most, he encouraged me. Gradually I began to calm down. A doctor arrived and relaxed me even further with a couple of pills. He said I was suffering from mental exhaustion. I told Steve and the doctor that all I wanted was a quiet room in a private hospital, a place where no one could find me and where I could sleep and forget about UFOs. A quick phone call and that was arranged. I cannot remember too much about my first night in hospital but I do recall that I had a game of chess with Steve. I think I was anxious to prove that I had not lost all my marbles. He won the game but at least I knew I was still hanging in there.

While the afternoon’s drama was being played out in Melbourne, Sue and the boys were relaxing at the beach in Christchurch. Later that afternoon, when they got back to the Grants, Sue called the channel to speak to me. Neil

Miller told her what had happened and said the channel would get her and the boys back to Australia on the first available flight.

About half-past 10 the next morning Steve arrived and told me had had spoken to the channel management the night before. He was told that the senior executive I had spoken to initially had since discovered that the channel had commissioned me and therefore they held the copyright of the film. The channel would reimburse me for my out-of-pocket expenses, pay the Crocketts for their work, and pay me a bonus.

Later in the day the doctor arrived to check me out. He told Steve that I appeared to be more rational and was no longer suffering from paranoia. Maybe he should have been around later that night when I looked out the window and said: “Well you bastards, if you’re coming to get me, you’ve only got a couple of hours.” I like to believe now that that was just a feeble attempt at humour.

The following morning Sue, Daniel and Benny arrived at the hospital with a surprise visitor, Ngaire Crockett. She had been most upset to hear what had happened to me and had decided to take the same flight as Sue and the boys. She told me that her lawyer in Wellington was convinced the film, or at least part of it, was legally ours. Ngaire pointed out that I had commissioned her and David to fly only as far as Christchurch. Ostensibly their commitment to the channel finished there. Her legal adviser said the return trip to Blenheim, when most of the footage was shot, was at the personal invitation of Bill Startup and therefore had nothing to do with Channel O. Ngaire also told me that David was making a documentary on the sightings and had arranged exclusive interviews with all those concerned. She said she wanted me with them on an equal share basis and gave me a note from David to that effect. Evidently David was planning to go back up in an Argosy that Saturday night, this time with Vern Powell, and he was hoping to film more UFOs. I had my fingers crossed that he would succeed. I certainly must be getting better, I thought, to be wishing more UFOs on my head.

My lawyer also dropped in to see me that day and he was still quite sure we had a strong legal claim to the film. But although he was confident, he was not prepared to give us any better than a 50-50 chance of winning a court battle. And he pointed out that if we lost we could face a legal bill of between $20,000 and $40,000. That was not a very appealing prospect to a man lying

in a hospital bed and who knew full well that his bank balance was leaning towards the red.

By Friday, 5 January, I had had enough of hospital life and I discharged myself and went home. It was great to be back in familiar surroundings but I knew I still had a long way to go before I would be ready to face the world again.

Chapter 8: Demons and Things

The next day I learned that Lee was off to the US with the film, on a trip that apparently was being paid for by the *National Enquirer* newspaper. He took the film in a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist! James Bond, eat your heart out!

As I mentioned earlier, I was not quite ready to face the public eye again. I wanted some time to build up my strength. I had lost my appetite while I was in hospital and my weight had dropped by about five kilos in one week. Strangely, that strong sulphur odour that I began to give off after a run in the Wairarapa countryside a couple of days before the Argosy flight, persisted. It was very noticeable, so much so that Sue asked me whether I was still using a deodorant. When I said that I was she suggested that I change to a stronger brand. The odour persisted for about two weeks and it was only later, when I bought several books on the UFO phenomenon, that I learned about the "sulphur link" in some UFO incidents. Apparently it is quite common for UFO witnesses to report a strong, sulphurous smell at the scene of a sighting. In most of these cases the witnesses and the UFO are in close proximity. Our sighting had taken place in the night sky with the witnesses separated from the mystery objects by the metal shell of the aircraft and, sometimes, by distances of many miles. There had been no interaction between the objects and the witnesses at a personal level, or at least none that we were aware of. Of course there was the strange feeling experienced by Dennis and myself that "something" had come aboard the aircraft. In the circumstances I believe we were quite entitled to a few feelings of insecurity and apprehension. But, if we did not have a close interaction with any of the UFOs, then what caused the sulphur odour? Remember that I first noticed it after a run through the New Zealand countryside. You may recall also that during one of my runs I experienced a feeling of apprehension, confusion and vulnerability. Why? I do not normally feel that way when I am running and I do not normally give off a sulphur smell. Unfortunately I cannot provide answers to any of the strange occurrences that surround this story and, at the time of my discharge

from hospital, I was trying not to dwell on such matters.

In those first few weeks I received a lot of mail from around the world and some of the letters made interesting reading. There were suggestions that I had met up with Satan and his demons and also that I had encountered the angels of the Lord. These particular writers all claimed to be Christians and used the Scriptures to back up their theories, or should I say they used their own interpretations of the Scriptures. Take these few paragraphs for example. They come from a letter written by a man who says he is a lay pastor in the Uniting Church:

"I will be honest with you. I have been a Christian for a number of years and in the past I had quite an active interest in the UFO phenomenon.

"I read many books and journals on the subject, joined the Victorian UFO Research Society; gave talks on the subject to different groups; witnessed a UFO myself with other people in 1971 – a silent orange light that moved erratically across the sky, and in 1974, I 'accidentally' photographed a UFO while taking two exposures of the moon setting.

"I believe UFOs exist. Three years ago I read two books that brought an abrupt end to my interest. After reading these books I burned all the material I had collected. I became aware that persons dabbling deeply in the subject can open themselves unsuspectingly to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual damage."

This particular gentleman included a book which was the personal account of a man who had allegedly "wrestled" with demons along the length and breadth of New Zealand and who was quite convinced that UFOs heralded the coming of the anti-Christ. In one part of the book, while the author was travelling on the west coast of the South Island, he was apparently joined in the car by a demon who tried to "strangle" him. That particular incident comes under the sub-heading, "Demon Activity While Travelling." Other sub-heads are "The Local Demon Looked Me Over," and "Seeking to Devour."

Another writer also introduced herself as a Christian and as an ardent Bible student. After searching the Scriptures she discovered that UFOs were "not from the Lord." She also enclosed a book and said that although I might not accept it straight away, it would warn me about the dangers of looking into

other theories about UFOs. She wrote:

"You did say that while you were afraid at one stage, you later began to feel that if they were going to take you it probably wouldn't be such a bad experience.

"This, Mr Fogarty, is how Satan bluffs the people who will be fooled by him. He lulls them into a false security.

"We are living in strange times and our safety lies in knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Redeemer. It is by His shed blood at Calvary that He washed away the sins of those who turn to Him.

"This is a day when more than ever we need Him and His protection and wisdom. May He bless you as you read this book."

As I mentioned, not everyone adhered to the Satan theory. There were those who thought that UFOs were firmly on the right hand of God. For example:

"Our family watched with great interest your report on the recently-sighted UFOs over Christchurch and wish to compliment you on the excellent coverage, photography and reporting of such an unusual subject.

"We were particularly interested in your comments that you are 'not a religious person,' but nevertheless you stated that it was definitely a 'spiritual experience.'

"With respect, I would like to refer you to a particular passage of scripture, namely Luke, Chapter 21, Verse 11 – 'Great signs shall there be from Heaven;' Verse 25 – 'There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars.'

"Indeed, the whole chapter clearly refers to the phenomena you have experienced in the end times of this age and prior to the return to earth of Jesus Christ."

Another lady, who made no mention of any religious tendencies, told me that she "knew what planet these aliens come from." She also professed to know how the UFOs entered the earth's atmosphere and how they returned to their home planet. Although she admitted she did not know the exact reason for their visits, she thought it might have something to do with "trying to crack the earth's crust and make it look like natural disasters." She even invited me to her home to witness the comings and goings of the aliens and she

mentioned that their home planet was due outside her back door in the next couple of weeks.

There were other people who had heard about my experience and my collapse and who wrote to genuinely wish me a speedy recovery. Others had had encounters of their own and wished to share their experiences with me. But at the time I was having enough trouble coming to terms with my own experiences and I certainly did not want to get involved in anyone else's UFO encounters. Until then my only communication with the general public had been through these letters, but I knew it would not be long before I was pestered on the phone. So, one of the first things I did on getting out of hospital was to have my number changed and unlisted. I also thought this would keep the news media off my back since I was aware they were after a story about my collapse and the events that had led up to it. What I did not realise was that by having my number changed and unlisted, the speculation about what had happened to me would increase and lead to stories that I had gone into hiding. I prefer to think it was more a case of keeping a low profile. My friends and family knew where I was and they were the only people I wanted any contact with at the time.

One reporter, however, did find out where I lived and on the afternoon of 6 January, the day after I got out of hospital, she knocked on the front door. I agreed to talk to her so long as we did not discuss my relationship with the channel and also that I tape the conversation. She was not too happy about either of these stipulations but she did her interview and I was sure she had enough for her article. The next day I went out and bought a newspaper but there was nothing. Her opposition paper, however, had gone big on the story. No one from the paper had spoken to me but that was of no concern; in fact it added some spice to the report, which was headlined: "UFO Man Is In Hiding," and there was a sub-head, "New TV Mystery." The story took up the entire front page and most of page three and there was also a photograph of me. They even had a quote from my doctor saying that I was in neither an emotional nor a mental state to see anybody. I rang my doctor to find out if he had spoken to the paper but he said he had not. I could only assume that it was one of those interviews that reporters occasionally conduct with their typewriters. It is a great way of getting juicy quotes. I remember thinking at the time that the reporter who came out to see me must have been most upset

when she saw the opposition's front page. After all, she had spoken to me only a few hours earlier. But the following week her paper published an article in the true tradition of Sunday tabloid journalism.

I really only had myself to blame for what did appear in print. During the interview she had asked me an incredibly loaded question and I had fallen for the old trick, hook, line and sinker.

Her question: "Are you afraid that people might think you're mad?" (Obviously a reference to my collapse).

My reply: "Of course I'm afraid that people will think I'm mad ..."

But the rest of the sentence got lost in the rush to get the banner headline done. And it was a beauty: "UFO Reporter Fears Mad Tag." It was much better than "UFO Man Is In Hiding" and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. After that article I decided to be more careful in my dealings with the news media.

In those first few days out of hospital I was interested in what Lee was doing in the US with the film. Before he left he had spoken to my wife and told her that the *National Enquirer* newspaper offered a $50,000 prize for the best UFO sighting of the year and $1 million for proof of extraterrestrial life. I had become a rather suspicious soul by this stage and I decided to ring the Washington office of the *Enquirer* to find out exactly what was going on. I spoke to a Mr Peter Judd, who said that his brief was simply to meet Lee and David Boulter (a Channel O cameraman) and to have a copy of the film made for some sort of analysis. I then asked him about the prizes his organisation was allegedly offering but he said he had never heard of them and suggested they might be connected with some UFO group. He was emphatic that they had nothing to do with the *Enquirer* and he promised to contact his superiors and get back to me. He also sounded a little concerned when I mentioned there could be some legal complications over the copyright of the film.

I decided to make some further inquiries about the alleged prize money and I called up Neil Miller. He was happy to hear that I was up and about and he confirmed that the *Enquirer* was offering the prizes that Lee had mentioned. In fact, he had heard we had already won the $50,000 for the best sighting of 1978. How strange, I thought. The man from the *Enquirer* denies there is any such prize and here I am being told the money is as good as mine. I

discovered later that the *Enquirer* did offer a yearly prize and also the $1 million reward for proof of extraterrestrial life. I still have no idea why their man told me otherwise. Miller also informed me that the film was now being examined by NICAP. He said that with the aid of computer enhancement, NICAP would be able to prove whether or not we had filmed a genuine UFO.

It was about this time that I began to read through all the newspaper cuttings to find out exactly what sort of reaction the story had provoked. I had expected some criticism from the scientific quarter but, as I waded through the mass of cuttings, I was quite amazed by some of the frantic attempts to rationalise what we had seen. Some of the explanations were quite absurd, ranging from flocks of mutton birds heading inland to mate, to moonlight reflecting off cabbage patches. But the most common explanations were Venus and Jupiter. The head of the Mount John Observatory in New Zealand, Mr David Mabin, was quoted as saying, even before seeing the news item, that he was 99 per cent sure we had filmed Venus. The next day, after watching the news, he changed his mind and said we had most probably filmed Jupiter under very poor viewing conditions. Britain's leading radio astronomer, Sir Bernard Lovell, put it down to a shower of meteorites that had failed to burn up in the earth's atmosphere.

Other critics suggested that we had been watching and filming ball lightning, which they said, could grow quite large, give off a bright light, change colour, move quickly and be picked up by radar. Everyone was sure that what we had filmed could be explained in conventional terms. Of course there were suggestions that we had hoaxed the whole thing and that sort of criticism really hurt. One of those who leant heavily to the hoax theory was a Sydney amateur astronomer, Robert Lanigan-O'Keeffe. He was quoted as saying he was 100 per cent sure we had had a distant encounter with Jupiter.

"You have to be merciless when people make claims about an event of incalculable importance in the history of mankind," he said. Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe then embarked on a crusade against the channel, and me in particular, mainly through the pen of Ben Sandilands, a reporter with the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Later I will go more deeply into Lanigan-O'Keeffe's theories and his apparent motives.

In that first week out of hospital I was very concerned to get my side of the story told without the drama and the headlines. I rang the offices of the

Bulletin, a weekly magazine distributed throughout Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. I pointed out that the latest copy of the magazine had a long article, including a front-page cover, which set out to debunk UFOs in general and the New Zealand sightings in particular. I said I would like the right of reply and also the chance to correct a few of the misquotes and distortions that had appeared in other publications. One of their reporters interviewed me and wrote a fair and sympathetic piece, titled "Scars of the Encounter."

Meanwhile, my legal advisers, who by this stage included a Queen's Counsel, had decided to institute proceedings against Channel O. In a letter to the channel they stated my claims to the film and also detailed the conversation I had with the senior executive on 2 January and the assurances he had given me. They tried to avoid court action by adding a rider that we would be prepared to consider an out-of-court settlement. The channel asked for time to consider our proposals. A couple of days later, however, their solicitors came back with a firm "no" to our proposals. My legal eagles got together again and came up with a revised proposal. They sent it off to the channel and this time at least their lawyers agreed to sit down and talk "without prejudice."

Those days were terribly frustrating, waiting for phone calls from my lawyer and wondering what the hell was happening in the US with the film. I was under a lot of pressure and this was not helping things on the home front. Sue and the boys were finding it hard to cope with the changed and somewhat battered spirit who had returned to their lives. I was irritable, tense and completely obsessed with what had happened to me and the situation in which I now found myself. I kept hoping for a solution and I wanted desperately to get my life back to some semblance of normality.

On 19 January, with Lee and the film still in the US and no further word on the legal front, I decided to get out of limbo land. I wrote out my resignation, delivered it to the channel and then rang David in New Zealand to say that I was coming over to help him with the documentary. By this stage Sue had just about had enough. She was sick to death of UFOs and everything to do with them. Our relationship, which had survived some pretty stormy passages, was beginning to founder. Sue left the house at every opportunity in an effort to get away from me and my obsession. I had lost interest in

everything but UFOs. It was not a conscious decision on my part – I simply could not help myself. I thought that if I went away for a short while we might be better able to take stock of the situation and, I hoped, resolve our problems.

There was one thing I had to do before leaving for New Zealand and that was to call on Guido Valentich, the father of the young pilot who had mysteriously disappeared over Bass Strait three months earlier after allegedly being buzzed by a UFO. I wanted to include an interview with Guido in the documentary because it was really the interest generated by the disappearance of Frederick Valentich that had led to my presence on board the Argosy that December morning. Guido told me he was firmly convinced a UFO had taken his son and that he was still alive. Nothing I said or asked could shake his conviction that a UFO had been responsible for his son's disappearance. My story had given Guido a little more hope. I thanked him and promised to keep in touch.

Chapter 9: Documentary-Makers

David and Ngaire were waiting at Wellington airport when my flight from Melbourne touched down late on the afternoon of 22 January. It was great to see them again. We had been through a lot together and we were now hoping we could get something constructive done and maybe make a dollar or two in the process.

Those first few days in New Zealand were extremely busy for the three of us. My first task was to go through the script that David had written and rewrite it almost completely. David was more than thankful, for he confessed he was no writer. I also heard the tapes of the conversations between the plane and Wellington radar during the sightings and was completely taken aback by their clarity and the almost nonchalant way that those incredible happenings were being reported and confirmed. Once we had the opening format for the program worked out, I went through all the tapes of the interviews David had already done and picked out the most relevant segments. I then wrote all the linking voice-overs and stand-ups. It felt good to be doing something again after three weeks of moping around the house. Within two days I had nearly completed the scripts and we knew exactly where we were going. Our main concern was to tell the story exactly as it happened.

The author and David Crockett take a welcome break during the filming of a documentary on the sightings in January 1979.

David had managed to talk to one of New Zealand's foremost ufologists, airline captain Bruce Cathie. He had written a number of books on the subject and had put forward some rather startling theories. For instance, he believed UFOs were both extraterrestrial and man-made and that they drew their energy source from a grid system that criss-crosses the earth. He claimed visitors from outer space also used this system as a navigational aid. Cathie was quite convinced that we had "definite hardware" up in the sky the morning we were filming.

I could not wait to put Cathie's theories to the Ministry of Defence, which had decided to hold an official inquiry into the 21 and 31 December sightings. I arranged an interview with Squadron Leader Geoff Clarke, one of the ministry's public relations officers, for the morning of 25 January. I began by asking his reaction to Cathie's claim that some UFOs were secret, man-made machines. He admitted that he had read about that particular theory but as far as he was aware there was no supporting evidence. I then questioned him about the role taken by the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) after our story had made headlines around the world. He said an Orion aircraft, loaded with sophisticated monitoring equipment, had been sent into the area in an attempt to find the mysterious objects we had seen. According to Squadron Leader Clarke they had found nothing, even though

they did check out a number of unidentified targets given to them by Wellington radar. But on a number of occasions when the Orion reached the area where a target had been reported, it encountered turbulence. I suggested maybe that was evidence that something had suddenly moved away at high speed. Squadron Leader Clarke did not believe that. In fact he did not appear to be impressed by UFOs at all.

Coincidentally, while we were in Clarke's office, the Air Force released its official report of its investigation into the sightings. Just after we had finished the interview Clarke handed me a copy of the report. He would not comment on it but told me there would be a press conference later that day. David, Ngaire and I were excited by that news because we thought it would give us a chance to question the investigating officer. Unfortunately, after checking with another section of the ministry, we were told there would be no press conference and no further comment. Maybe that was a very wise move on the part of the ministry because subsequent developments made the report seem like an official whitewash, in keeping with the apparent practice of most governments around the world.

Before I reproduce a transcript of that report, I would like to recount an amusing incident that occurred after the interview with Clarke. David, Ngaire and I went outside the Defence Ministry building to film a short piece-to-camera that I intended to use to introduce the Clarke interview. I sat down on a low stonewall that runs alongside the footpath and completed my brief introduction. We had just finished when a senior public relations spokesman from the ministry, a person I knew quite well from my days as a television reporter in Wellington, walked out. He looked at me, looked up at the heavens and, with a smile and a laugh; he said he hoped that "it" (the heavens, UFOs, or whatever) would fall on my head. Although it was said in apparent jest, it was obvious that the events of 21 and 31 December were causing the New Zealand Defence people a big problem. It was a problem they would have to solve, somehow!

Their first attempt was the report released by the Air Force. The following is a complete transcript:

"The unidentified radar and visual sightings reported by aircraft and the Air Traffic Control radars off the north-east coast of the South Island recently are the result of natural but unusual atmospheric phenomena. This is the

conclusion arrived at in the Air Force's just completed investigation into the sightings. Before arriving at his conclusions, the investigating officer interviewed all the principle [sic] witnesses involved in the sightings on the nights of December 20 and 30. He also worked closely with the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Civil Aviation Division of the Ministry of Transport, and the Meteorological Service.

"His report reveals that during the months of December and early January, atmospheric conditions over New Zealand were conducive to freak effects on radar and light waves. Also, the planet Venus was rising in the eastern sky early in the morning, and at this time of the year is unusually bright in appearance. It was also revealed that for some time the Wellington Air Traffic Control radar has been giving spurious returns off the east coast of the South Island. Over the period more than 50 Japanese squid boats sailed from Wellington to a position 120 miles off Banks Peninsula. Not only would the squid boats give a good source of radar return whilst in transit to the squid fishing grounds, but they generate a very large amount of light when fishing at night. Each boat generates about 200 kilowatts of light to attract squid to its lures, and this light source cannot be discounted as a cause of some of the visual sightings.

"The investigating office also speculates that lights seen in the Clarence River mouth could have come from trains or vehicles travelling along the coast, and affected by unusual atmospheric reflections and refractions. There is no evidence to connect the many radar and visual sightings in the Clarence River and the larger lights seen to the east.

"A Ministry of Defence spokesman said the Ministry was completely satisfied there were no unexplained physical objects in the skies at the time of the sightings. The lights were almost certainly from surface or planetary sources affected by atmospheric reflection, refraction and distortion. Radar sets are known to be subject to spurious returns, and it was significant that on the occasions the large light was being filmed by a television team on-board the Argosy freighter, neither Christchurch or Wellington radars reported any related visual sightings on their screens. The spokesman said that the Ministry of Defence was not specifically charged with formal responsibility for investigating so-called unidentified flying objects in peacetime. However, the Ministry does take an active interest in all such reports and within the

limitations of its resources, conducts investigations as necessary.

"Commenting on some media speculation that the country was defenceless against air attack, the spokesman said that New Zealand did not have a complex air defence system, comprising sophisticated radar equipment and a force of missiles and interceptor aircraft. The recently announced Defence Review explains that over the next decade at least, a physical threat to New Zealand's security, by sea or from the air, is so remote that expenditure of funds on sophisticated air defence equipment could not be justified. No costing of a comprehensive air defence system for New Zealand had been done, but the Defence spokesman said that the bill would be enormous and well beyond current resource levels.

"The Defence spokesman concluded by saying that the Ministry totally discounts the possibility of visits to New Zealand, and particularly to the areas of the country where the recent reports have suggested, of alien aircraft or other flying machines. It also categorically discounts any suggestion that air activity of any kind has taken place that poses any threat to New Zealand's security. Defence does not share the view of those who believe we are visited from outer space, or covertly by the aircraft or machines of potentially unfriendly nations."

I remember thinking at the time whether the use of the word "unfriendly" had been deliberate. If so, then maybe that was an admission by the Defence Ministry that the objects were aircraft or machines of *friendly* nations. I wonder?

There are a number of interesting aspects to the report. For instance, it says the investigating officer interviewed all the principal witnesses before arriving at his conclusions. David, Ngaire and I had a good laugh when we read that. We considered ourselves to be principal witnesses and so did Dennis Grant. But now one of us was interviewed or spoken to by any member of the New Zealand government before the report was released. That means that out of a total of six people on board the Argosy, four were not consulted. Yet the report said otherwise. Like so many of our critics, the New Zealand Ministry of Defence and the other government bodies involved did not have access to the film, nor to all the relevant data. But, in spite of that, the ministry's investigating officer concluded that what we had seen and filmed was the result of natural, but unusual, atmospheric phenomena.

Since the report failed to say exactly what we had filmed, I called up the ministry's public relations section to see if they could shed any light on the matter. I was told by a gentleman name Chris Cole that I could "safely assume" that we had filmed Venus. If the ministry had taken the trouble to check, they would have discovered that Venus had not even risen at the time we were filming. Still, we must not let facts get in the way of a good down-to-earth, reassuring whitewash. Although I did not really think the authorities would say that UFOs existed, I had hoped that just for once they would have the courage to admit they were baffled.

Although I was not particularly upset by the report, I know that the Argosy crews and the air traffic controllers involved in both sightings were far from happy. Vern Powell said the report was predictable and certainly did not explain some of the things that had happened. Bill Startup said the Air Force was just covering old ground and that it was a case of a lot of specialists trying to make the circumstances of that particular morning fit in with their own opinions of what had occurred. "They've no more come up with an answer as to what it was, than anyone else," he was quoted as saying. In private conversations with me, both Bill and Vern said they felt the interviews with the investigating officer were a waste of time since it was obvious from his attitude that he had already made up his mind. Andy Herd said the fact that there had been visual sightings as well as radar confirmation was too much of a coincidence to be dismissed.

I should add that when I phoned the Defence Ministry and asked for the name of the investigating officer, I was told that his name was being kept secret. In the circumstances that seemed rather appropriate; after all, what better person to investigate unidentified flying objects than an unidentified flying officer. Later I was to discover that his name was Wing Commander John Clements, the director of air navigation for the Defence Ministry.

Undeterred by the Air Force and its report, we continued with our documentary. I was extremely pleased that the report came out when it did because it reopened the whole UFO debate. Both television channels in New Zealand and the country's radio stations gave wide coverage to the report and the criticism from the witnesses.

Three days later, on 28 January, we took a flight to Blenheim where we had arranged with Bill Startup and Bob Guard to film interiors on board the

Argosy that night. We wanted to simulate the flight of 31 December. The Crocketts' eldest son, Brent, who had become completely enthralled by the subject of UFOs and the documentary in particular, was acting as our second cameraman. David could not do any filming since he was one of the central characters. Brent filmed us on the flight deck, in the cargo hold area, and also getting on and off the plane.

For the first time since we started the documentary, we began to run into a few snags. Ngaire had misplaced a tape from an interview with Bob Guard and the portable light we were using for filming kept fading because the battery had not been properly charged. In normal circumstances these would have been small, easily solved problems. But I could sense that the pilots had just about had enough of the whole thing and I was not too keen on the idea of having to go through it all again myself. Also, I thought it would be only a matter of time before Safe Air decided it too had had enough of the UFO business and all its attendant publicity. So that night in Blenheim was really out last chance to get the material we needed.

Meanwhile, Leonard Lee had arrived back in Melbourne, apparently after a tiff with the *National Enquirer*. Soon after his return the phone lines between Australia and New Zealand began to run hot. Lee rang the Crocketts, he rang Dennis Grant, he rang Bill Startup and in between times he rang my wife at our home in Melbourne. Those calls began to drive us all up the wall. Lee was desperate to get everybody back on side again, mainly because he knew Bruce Maccabee was on his way to Australia and New Zealand. Dr Maccabee would have been very upset if he arrived and found that no one connected with the sightings would talk to him. David, Ngaire and I decided we would say nothing unless Channel O was prepared to negotiate a satisfactory deal in relation to the copyright of our original UFO footage. Bill Startup wanted to co-operate because he welcomed the chance of a scientific investigation, especially in view of the New Zealand Air Force report. But he was also aware of our feelings and did not want to step on our toes. The channel had another very good reason for wanting to get us back on side. They were planning a major documentary on the sightings and to do this they needed everyone's co-operation. Obviously something had to be done, otherwise everyone would lose out and the scientific investigation might never take place. We had all taken a hammering at the hands of the critics and we knew

that no one had yet come up with a satisfactory explanation for what we had seen and filmed. Maybe Bruce Maccabee could unravel the mystery.

My wife, who had so desperately wanted to get on board the Argosy at Christchurch that morning, now had her chance to become part of the story. In fact, without her courage and perseverance there is every possibility that our sightings would have become just another case and not, as it turned out, an event that would turn the scientific world on its ear. The channel had indicated that it was quite willing to discuss the whole situation without the respective lawyers. Since I was in New Zealand, Sue said she would do what she could on our behalf. On 31 January she spent four hours at the channel and worked out a verbal agreement that seemed fair and reasonable. The channel also offered to buy the documentary that David and I were marking for incorporation into its proposed program. There was, however, one snag. The channel wanted me back at work as soon as possible and indicated that any agreement would depend on my return to the fold. Although I was initially reluctant, I decided it was probably the best way to get everything settled. On Saturday, 3 February, I returned to Melbourne and three days later I was back at my desk in the newsroom.

Chapter 10: Dreams and Schemes

On 12 February, Maccabee arrived in Melbourne after spending several days in New Zealand interviewing the aircrew and the Crocketts. I was excited about meeting him for the first time and hearing how his investigation was progressing. I was in the newsroom when Maccabee came in with Lee and I sat at my desk waiting to be introduced. Eventually Maccabee came across and introduced himself. He was fully aware that all was not well between Lee and myself and I could sense that he felt he had been caught in the crossfire. But since I was as keen as anyone to see his investigation completed, I indicated that I would give him my full co-operation. We spent most of that first afternoon in an editing room running the film through time and time again. Maccabee was anxious to establish when and where each segment of the film had been shot and I was able to help him with this. He then began to explain some of the detail on the film, detail that I had not noticed before. That was very exciting. The main object we had filmed went through a number of definite shape changes, from round to almost triangular. Also, with the aid of a magnifying glass, it was possible to pick up three or four separate colour sources within the body of the light. One way to describe this would be to imagine an almost transparent whitish-yellow sac, containing a number of different balls of light with the predominant colours being red, orange, blue and green. To me it appeared that the shape changes were caused by the balls of light moving around inside the main body. It really was quite extraordinary.

Maccabee was obviously convinced that we had captured something very exciting and, over the next couple of days, we went through the 31 December encounter over and over again attempting to detail everything that had happened. Slowly, but surely, I began to realise that I was building up a formidable arsenal with which to confront my critics.

Amateur astronomer Robert Lanigan-O'Keeffe had been one of the first to jump into print with the declaration that we had filmed Jupiter. The other

critics and scoffers made their claims and were then silent. Not so Lanigan-O'Keeffe! He kept up a steady barrage against me and the channel through the columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I must concede that some of these articles made quite convincing reading but the general public was not to know that Lanigan-O'Keeffe was working from very limited data, which in some cases was completely incorrect. Evidently he had taken a video copy of the original news items and subjected it to a line-scanning process. This, he claimed, had shown four smaller objects that he declared were the moons of Jupiter. He said the "moons" were exactly where they should have been at the time we were filming. That was the claim he made in public, but in private he confessed to some nagging doubts.

In a letter to the channel, dated 25 January 1979, he admitted that the "moons" were not quite in the right position. He was, however, still 100 per cent sure we had filmed Jupiter, which could mean only one thing – we had hoaxed the film! He suggested that we had done some of the filming two hours later than we said and from a well-supported ground mount, not from an airborne Argosy. Lanigan-O'Keeffe's rather startling letter to the channel is reproduced in full in Appendix B. Apart from exposing the "hoax," he offered the channel the chance to restore its credibility, with his help, of course. He suggested the channel produce a documentary and that "naturally, it will be up to the audience to accuse the previously mentioned characters [Fogarty and Crockett] of their actions." He said that Fogerty [sic] would come up looking like the George Adamski of the 1980s, while the network would be praised for "its honest and unique quality of reporting the factual truth." I was not aware of any other kind!

He informed the channel that any money he received from such a program would, "in the main," be donated to the Illawarra Astronomical Society for construction of its observatory.

"If, however, you believe my help is not needed," he wrote, "then you *must* wait for my scientific article before proceeding, as in true form I am not telling you what I know to be the conclusive proof of the intentional half-hoax.

"I trust that in future, the network keeps up the good work and that from such a program, the cranks in our community who fake UFO films (for reasons which only they know) will not be so determined in future."

As you can imagine, by the time I waded through the ramblings and invective, I was angry. I do not like being called a hoaxer, which in simple terms means a liar. But once my temper had cooled I realised that Lanigan-O'Keeffe was so far off the mark that he was not worth worrying about. I consigned my not too friendly amateur astronomer to the dark recesses of my mind, but unfortunately I was to hear a lot more from him.

Those early days back at the channel were extremely frustrating since it was quite obvious that Lee was now totally in control of the UFO story. There were times when I felt like standing up and screaming: "Remember me, I was the guy on board the plane! It's my story!" But I held my tongue, watched and waited.

Gradually the cold war between Lee and myself began to thaw. It was quite obvious that if the story were to get any further we would have to work together. No amount of wishful thinking on my part could change the hard, cold fact that Lee had won the story by default and that my only chance of getting involved again would be on a shared basis. So we began talking to one another again, although it was obvious that our friendship of old was unlikely to flourish again.

Dr Bruce Maccabee. His analysis of the film and all the relevant data proved that the objects could

not be explained in conventional terms.

Maccabee returned to the US and said he would release his findings at a press conference in Washington, DC, some time in March. I decided that perhaps that conference would provide me with the perfect opportunity to get back into the story on a personal level. I made up my mind to attend the conference, even if I had to sell my car to pay for the fare. But I planned to do that only as a last resort and I began to look around for an easier and cheaper way.

First I tried the channel, although I did not really think they would agree. I was right – they had no intention of sending anyone. I had already approached Australian *Playboy* magazine with the offer of a personal account of the encounter and its aftermath and I suggested they might sponsor my trip in exchange for an exclusive story. They were interested, but they held off on an immediate decision.

I then decided to play my trump card. I knew that Lee was just as keen to get to the States as I was, so I suggested that I should be at the press conference. I pointed out the very strong possibility that the event might turn into a dry, scientific debate and that my presence might just add the human touch needed to sell the story to the American news media. I knew that any plan Lee came up with would include him but that did not worry me. All I wanted was a free trip to the States.

Lee did me proud. He got in touch with the American Broadcasting Company and, although I do not know what he suggested, they were certainly interested. According to Lee, they wanted us to appear on their prestigious Good Morning America program. The other guests would be Maccabee and Hynek, perhaps the best known and the most widely respected ufologist in the world. After Good Morning America, the plan was for us all to fly to Washington for the press conference. When Lee first told me the news I did not build up my hopes too much as I had suffered so many disappointments already.

On 9 March came the news I had been waiting for. The ABC had agreed to pay our travel to New York and our accommodation, and they wanted me to appear on Good Morning America on 26 March. A couple of hours later we

were to hold our press conference in New York, not in Washington as originally planned. The following day I had a call from the Channel O news director, Eddie Dean, who officially informed me of the trip and told me that he was going as well to help arrange the press conference.

My relationship with the Crocketts took a nose-dive during this time. The problem was that David was unwilling to abide by our agreement to sell our documentary to the channel. I could get nowhere with him, either by telephone or by writing. His change of heart was brought about by a number of things. To start with he was concerned that the channel would dramatise the final program that went to air. Also, Startup, Guard and Powell had told him that no part of the documentary that involved them (which was most of it) could be sold to the channel before it was shown in New Zealand. Bruce Cathie had also indicated that he would not allow the interview with him to be shown in Australia until it had been seen on New Zealand television. I felt sorry for David who had been left to field the flak from both sides. He wanted to sell so that he could recover his costs but he also felt a moral obligation towards the people we had filmed and interviewed. I tried to assure him that I had been promised some control over the documentary and that I would do my best to ensure that the true story was told without any sensationalism. But any hope of placating the New Zealand quarter was dashed when David received a call from Leonard Lee. According to David, Lee told him he had taken control of the whole project. The pilots and the Crocketts began to close ranks.

Then, sadly, I received a letter from the Crocketts' lawyer demanding immediate payment of $2000 towards the expenses of the film. If the money was not forthcoming, said the letter, then the Crocketts would no longer consider we had a 50-50 partnership. I rang David to find out what was going on and I pointed out that we had agreed to recoup our expenses by selling the film to the channel. After a lengthy conversation, we agreed that we should not be communicating through lawyers. I hung up, believing we had sorted out our problems.

Those 11 days waiting for my departure to the US were nerve-racking. I had been battered from so many sides during the previous three months that I was half-expecting someone to tap me on the shoulder and say, "hard luck Quentin, it's all a joke, you're not going anywhere!" I was also concerned

about a work-to-rule by air traffic controllers at Australia's airports that had led to a number of cancellations and delays to both domestic and international flights. I thought it would be rather ironic if air traffic controllers were to be responsible for keeping me in Australia, in light of the fact that their New Zealand colleagues had helped to get me into the whole mess in the first place. As it was, my confidence was shaken on 20 March, the day before I was due to leave, when I heard that the Qantas flight to the States for that particular day had been delayed by the air traffic controllers' industrial action. But my fears were unfounded and late on the afternoon of the following day, Qantas Flight Three took off from Melbourne and headed north to Sydney to pick up more passengers. We touched down there at 7.20 pm and were due to leave for Honolulu just over an hour later.

At 8.36 pm we were taxiing towards our take-off area. The captain informed us we had a couple of aircraft in front of us and that as soon as we were clear we would be taking off and heading out over Botany Bay. We lined up and I pressed my face to the window. There was the adrenalin-flowing surge of the Jumbo's four massive engines and we lurched down the runway. Suddenly, the engines throttled back and we began braking! Christ, I thought, what's going on? The captain came on the line and said we had a problem. The aircraft began heading back to the terminal. I could not believe it. After all those weeks I was finally on the verge of getting something back for the pain, the frustrations and the hassles. And now the bloody plane could not get off the ground. Apparently we had a problem with our nearside starboard engine and although the ground staff did their best to fix it, the City of Sale had decided that she did not want to go to America that night. So, instead of winging my way to Honolulu, I spent the night in a Sydney hotel as a guest of Qantas.

Our second attempt proved successful and at 8.22 the following morning we lifted off, Hawaii-bound. I looked out of the window at the offending engine and it appeared to be okay. So I sat back and enjoyed the free drinks. I was not sure whether the airline was trying to make up for the inconvenience, or whether it was hoping the alcohol would take our minds off the aborted take-off.

About 25 hours later, a weary and slightly bewildered young television reporter from Melbourne watched the Manhattan skyline through the window

of a United Airlines DC10 as it made its final approach to Newark Airport. In spite of the air traffic controllers, in spite of a faulty engine, in fact in spite of everything, I had made it. It was 4.30 New York time, on the afternoon of 22 March.

Chapter 11: Good Morning America

Those three days before Good Morning America and the press conference were busy but enjoyable. The ABC looked after us very well during our stay and put us up in a hotel bordering Central Park. I quickly fell in love with the sights and sounds of the Big Apple. I went for a couple of runs around Central Park (much to the consternation of Amy Hirsh, the ABC producer in charge of us, who feared that her "talent" might get mugged), did some shopping at Macy's department store and made a pilgrimage to Costello's Bar, the popular watering-hole for expatriate Australian journalists working in New York. I also managed to fulfill a promise I had made a few weeks earlier in Melbourne when I had interviewed Jim Fixx, the author of *The Complete Book of Running*, for Channel O news. I told Jim at the time that I was hoping to go to New York for the press conference and that if I did make it, I would try to join him for a run. Two days after my arrival I took a train to his home in Riverside, Connecticut.

The rain was pouring down as we set out on our late afternoon run but in spite of being soaked through, it was an enjoyable five-mile jog. After a shower we sat down to dinner – hamburgers and hot dogs cooked over an open fire, California red and Australian beer. Jim had decided to make me feel at home and had purchased a number of cans of a fine Aussie brew. I headed back to New York City, pleased with the run, the hospitality shown to me by Jim and Alice Fixx, and excited about the press conference and my coming debut on American television.

The next morning I met up with Bruce Maccabee and we spent several hours going over the press releases he had prepared for the conference. After lunch I met Allen Hynek for the first time, which was quite a thrill. He was very impressed with the sightings and, after studying Maccabee's findings, he gave them his unqualified support. In the afternoon, Maccabee, Hynek and I went over the format for the Good Morning America segment at the ABC studios. We viewed the piece of film we were going to use and discussed the

script with the writer. Finally she said she was happy with the material and told us that a limousine would be waiting outside our hotel at 7.15 the next morning to take us to the studios.

That night the channel did us proud – they paid for dinner for all of us and we certainly ate well. I sat beside Hynek and naturally the main topic of conversation at the table was UFOs. I recall telling Hynek that once I had got this particular story out of my system that would be the end of my involvement with UFOs. He just smiled at me, the sort of smile that said "Oh yes, we'll see about that." I had asked him one question in view of his past role as an official debunker of UFOs for the United States Air Force's Project Blue Book. I wanted to know why he had changed form a sceptic to a believer.

"It was like wearing a pair of tight shoes," he said. "As the evidence mounted up in their favour, the shoes got tighter and tighter until finally I took them off. And it felt just great."

There was a tremendous feeling of camaraderie around the table that night. We knew we were about to make public news that could ultimately be of tremendous importance to mankind. There were to be no claims that what had been captured on film was extraterrestrial. But we did have scientific proof that we had filmed an object that could not be identified – a UFO. I went to bed that night hoping for a good night's sleep because I knew I had a long day ahead of me. But sleep was to elude me. I awoke at exactly 3.26 am and for a moment I was bewildered by the strange surroundings. Then I remembered – New York, UFOs, Good Morning America. My stomach, battered by stress, jet lag, alcohol and rich food, cried out for the little white tablets. With the acid neutralised, I lay back and tried to relax. In less than six hours I was due to go before an estimated 25 million Americans on live television. Christ, I thought, is this really happening to me? I turned over and tried to sleep, but no such luck. Three hours later, after tossing and turning myself nowhere, I got up.

Hynek and Maccabee were waiting in the hotel foyer and we were soon in our limousine and heading for the nearby ABC studios. I was a nervous wreck. Although I had had plenty of on-air television experience, I found the prospect of appearing live before so many people rather daunting. Both Hynek and Maccabee appeared quite unperturbed, which only added to my

feeling of uneasiness. Usually the program originates in New York but on this particular day it was centred in Washington where Jimmy Carter had arranged for the Egyptians and Israelis to sign their historic peace treaty. We were taken to make-up and then shown to our places in the studio where we were introduced to our interviewer, Hugh Downs. At about quarter to nine our segment began. Downs backgrounded the story and played a couple of clips from the taped commentary I did on the flight. He began the interview by asking me to describe my feelings when I first saw the lights above Kaikoura and realised that something strange was going on. Over the next three minutes I did my best to relate the incredible happenings of that December morning. Then it was Maccabee's turn and he gave some details of his findings, with special emphasis on the fact that he had ruled out all the theories advanced so far to explain the sightings. Hynek used his few short minutes to launch a broadside at those scientists who had been quick to jump into print and dismiss the sightings in conventional terms.

"It exposes the irresponsibility of some scientists who have made ad hoc assumptions without looking at the data," he said.

He made special mention of the noted British radio astronomer, Sir Bernard Lovell, the man who had explained our sightings a few days after the event as meteorites that had failed to burn up on entering the earth's atmosphere. Hynek described that explanation as "preposterously stupid." He said our case firmly established "the respectability and the need for serious scientific research into the subject," and raised UFOs from the level of buffoonery and ridicule to serious scientific research. Unfortunately he was just starting to get into his stride when our time was up.

We went back to the hotel, very pleased with the way the TV spot had gone but slightly worried about the press conference that was less than two hours away. Our main concern was Jimmy Carter's little party on the front lawn of the White House. We knew the peace treaty signing would be the big headline-grabber of the day and we were afraid that our conference would be lost in the euphoria of shalom.

Chapter 12: The Press Conference

I hope the turnout at the press conference was not due entirely to the fact that we made it well known among the New York media that we would have plenty of Aussie beer on hand. We had arranged this with a Melbourne brewery before leaving Australia. They got in touch with their New York office and five dozen bottles were supplied. The conference started just after 11 o'clock, the room was crowded and we even ran out of publicity material. There were four of us at the table facing the press. On my immediate left was John Acuff, the outgoing president of NICAP, beside him Bruce Maccabee, and at the end of the table, Allen Hynek. After showing a short film, which featured some of the better shots of the objects as well as some computer-enhanced prints, Acuff got the conference under way.

"This is not a film of little green men waving at you," he said. "It's not dramatic in that sense of the word. In fact, in the UFO field, the cases of the little green men are usually highly sensationalised and have very little basis in fact and it is, in the 20 years of NICAP's existence, the only film that NICAP would say can be a verified film — a UFO."

Acuff said it was not possible to say that the lights we filmed were extraterrestrial. "All we can prove is that it is a film of a UFO and maybe one of these days the final answer will come about, and unidentified flying objects will become identified."

Hynek took the floor next. He said that when he first saw the film in the original news broadcast he had almost stuck his neck out and said it was the most interesting film he had ever seen.

"Dr Maccabee's most excellent and detailed analysis certainly has fully confirmed my intuitive response at that time," he said.

"It's true that there are many more cases that are more sensational than this one but they always seem to lack that final thing that suggests real significance. But the unique aspect of this is that we have a case that combines radar observations, visual observations from a total of six people,

and, of course, the movies."

Hynek said it was true that the great majority of UFO reports investigated by such groups as NICAP and his Center for UFO Studies turned out to be identifiable objects.

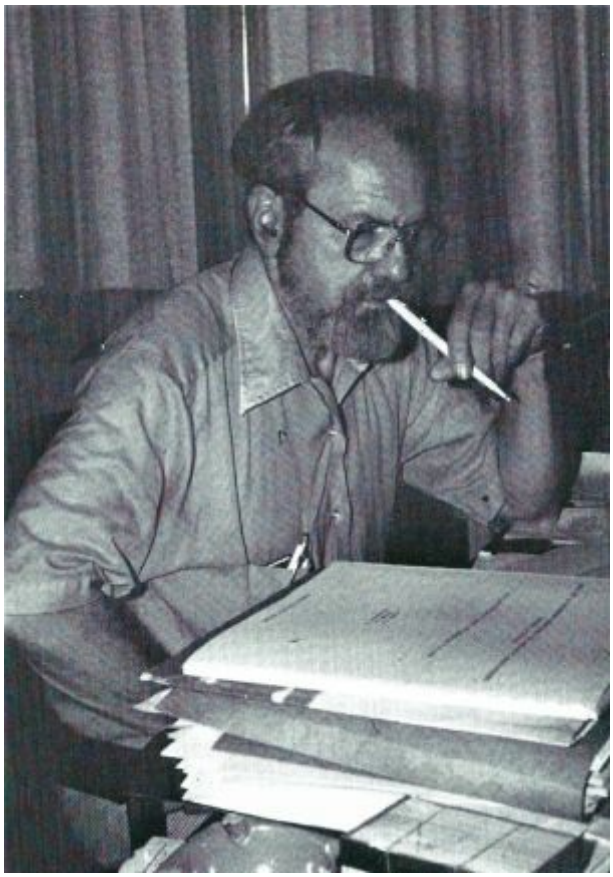
"Then, of course, there are always the crazies among people and when someone says they have taken a trip to Venus on a flying saucer and that gets played up by the media, it sets back serious research considerably.

"I'm glad to see that more and more serious scientists are finally coming around to taking the subject seriously."

Hynek said he had started at the US Air Force as a complete sceptic and now, 30 years down the road, the subject was "still hot." He said UFOs were a global phenomenon and the computerised data bank at CUFOS now contained over 75,000 reports from 133 countries. But the fact that the New Zealand case had come up with the "first ever verified film of a UFO" did not mean that those other 75,000 cases should be disregarded.

"There have been movies before," he said, "but there has always been some possibility that it was a hoax; some possibility that no one saw the person taking the movies at the time.

"I think we have bona fide photographs of daylight discs but I couldn't go before a Congressional investigating committee and say this is actually so. I can in this case say that the analysis of Dr Maccabee certainly indicates we have something here that no one has been able to come up with an explanation for."



Professor J Allen Hynek, Director of the UFO Centre for UFO Studies.

Unfortunately, Hynek had another engagement in Chicago and had to leave to catch his plane before the press conference had finished. Although he was there for only a short time his presence added prestige and credibility to our case. Then it was Bruce Maccabee's turn, and it was a Bruce Maccabee I had not seen before. In the short time I had known him, I found him a rather shy, quietly spoken individual. But there was nothing shy about his performance that morning. He showed a previously hidden confidence and he certainly had no fear of the assembled scribes. At one stage he gave them a tongue-lashing for the media's penchant for sensationalising UFO stories and even told one reporter that he thought his question was stupid. Still, no one got up and walked out, for which we were thankful.

Maccabee had done his homework and had taken the added precaution of submitting the film and his findings to other scientists. A total of 20 scientists and experts in the fields of optics, radar and physics studied our case and gave it their backing. They included Dr Richard Haines, an optical

physiologist employed by NASA; Dr Gilbert Levin, a biophysicist, whose company was involved in the design of the life-detection system sent to Mars on the Viking probes; and Dr Peter Sturrock, a plasma physicist at Stanford University. The others included four scientists working for a company in Palo Alto, California, a radar expert employed by a company in Northern Virginia, and several US Navy scientists. Most of the scientists who had analysed the evidence and gave it their backing requested that neither their names nor their organisations be mentioned because of their sensitive positions.

“Part of this is because of the press,” Maccabee told the conference. “The press usually plays up these stories and gives the whole subject a bad reputation.” This, he said, had been going on since UFOs were first reported back in 1947-48 and had led to many people being publicly criticised.

“Nobody likes to be criticised,” said Maccabee, “and the press added to this. They would concentrate on what’s been called the little green men stories, so it’s your guys’ fault that I can’t quote a group of four experts in Palo Alto, a radar expert working for a company in northern Virginia, a group of government agency scientists and several Navy scientists.

“Some of these radar people are the people who this country is relying on to make sure the Russians don’t get ahead of us. I don’t expect you guys are going to print this, but it’s your fault!”

That was when I would not have been surprised if someone had taken umbrage, but obviously the story was too hot, or the skins of the New York press corps too tough, to warrant a walkout.

Maccabee spent some time going through the various theories that had been advanced to explain away our sightings in conventional terms and, as part of the press kit, he included this brief outline of the reasons why those explanations did not hold up:

Venus — not visible, wrong direction; other planets — not bright enough, wrong direction; star — too dim, wrong directions, identified by crew; meteors — too long in view, wrong directions; balloons — none known in the area, move too slowly; ground lights — too dim, wrong directions, identified by crew; secret military manoeuvres — none known to RNZAF; fishing boats (squid fleet) — too far away, wrong directions, move too slowly; hoax — many witnesses unknown to each other before sightings,

government radar involved; radar “angels” — inversion too high and insufficient, little turbulence (“angels” do not explain dynamics of the targets); radar malfunction — radar needed no more than normal maintenance.

There were of course a number of reporters present who wanted longer and more detailed explanations, and Maccabee obliged. There was one individual who seemed obsessed with the idea that we had filmed some sort of military craft, either Russian or American. He questioned Maccabee about his job with the Navy and suggested that because of that connection Maccabee would not be able to admit to secret military manoeuvres, even if he wanted to.

Maccabee, who worked as a civilian scientist for the United States Navy’s Surface Weapons Center at White Oak, Maryland, reiterated that as far as he was concerned the objects had nothing to do with the military. He said he had spoken to the military in New Zealand and they had been willing to attribute everything to Venus, misidentification, atmospheric effects and so on.

“In their investigation they said they talked to all the witnesses,” he said. “In fact, they left out more than half. And they could explain everything away and even though they had put in a request for the film they said don’t bother to send it. When I went down there and showed them the film, it blew their minds!”

Maccabee then referred to the fact that the New Zealand Air Force had sent out an Orion aircraft, loaded with sophisticated monitoring equipment, two days after our sightings.

“It if was a secret military manoeuvre it wasn’t very secret,” he said. “There is an Argosy scheduled to fly down the east coast of New Zealand and if you’re going to do something secret, you certainly don’t have this great big light where everyone can see what you’re doing.”

Also, said Maccabee, if it were a secret military manoeuvre then the RNZAF must have been involved in a cover-up. “They must have set up this tremendous investigation as a smoke-screen for everyone else.” The questioner certainly deserved 10 marks for persistence. His next comment: “Knowing the CIA that wouldn’t be an impossible thing. It still doesn’t prove that it wasn’t military craft of some type.” He said the Germans had a disc-

shaped object on the drawing boards in 1941 and in view of the rapid development of technology since then, the ideal weapon would now be a disc-shaped craft. He seemed quite sure that either the Americans or the Russians had come up with such a machine.

I tried to interrupt him at this point to say that I thought the north-east coast of New Zealand's South Island was rather a strange place for either of the super-powers to be testing their secret flying machines. But before I could complete what I had to say Maccabee came in with the comment that the Americans had their own disc-shaped object on the drawing board and in fact the "flying flapjack," as it was known, was actually constructed.

"I was told it never flew," he said, "or, if it did, it flew on a test flight and never again."

Our friend with the CIA obsession wanted to continue with his line of questioning but another reporter rode over the top of him. He was from the *National Enquirer* and he wanted to know if there was any way that anyone could have tampered with the film. He had asked me the same question as I walked into the room. In other words, he wanted to know whether we had hoaxed the whole thing. Maccabee reported that it was not a hoax; although he was sure Hollywood could have come up with the same sort of film.

"This guy [Crockett] is a professional photographer, but in this situation he was an amateur," he said. "Take one of these people here [the TV cameramen present]. They are used to shooting pictures of large scenes that are totally illuminated. You go outside and photograph a bright light at night, standing in an aeroplane and holding a camera on your shoulder and so on, and things begin to fall apart. You look at the film and it looks exceedingly like an amateur with a good set of equipment." Maccabee explained that if it were a hoax, then everyone, including the government air traffic controllers, must have been involved.

He then went on to describe why our particular case was so different from the many thousands of others that had been reported previously.

"It is unique because when they flew out of Christchurch they actually were taking photographs of something that they were picking up on radar and seeing at the same time."

The journalists present were eager to find out if any further tests were to be

carried out on the film and, if so, whether these tests would reveal additional information. Maccabee said he was hoping to continue working on the film and said that further sophisticated computer analysis might reveal the exact shape and size of the objects, their aerodynamic characteristics and maybe, just maybe, their composition, be it animal, mineral or vegetable.

One lady reporter tried to get Maccabee to speculate on what the objects might be, but he refused.

“How could we tell what the moon was actually made of until we landed there?” he said. “Until somebody goes into the third-order analysis you won’t really know what this film can show.”

Acuff then took up the question and said he would try to explain it in simple, layman’s terms.

“There are things that are very different on this film,” he said. “Certainly, as Bruce says, we haven’t yet been able to come up with a positive answer in saying that this is a craft-like object made of gold or lead, or whatever it may be, and probably we never will from this film. But the case as a whole does show an object that behaved in ways that no conventional object is known to behave.

“This film alone would be extremely interesting but it becomes a great deal more interesting when you look at who the witnesses are, their background, the radar from the ground, which was a completely independent source, and the radar on the plane.

“You put all that together and you have to say this light behaved in ways that we cannot duplicate with any conventional light source, and that really is about all we can say at this time.

“This is the frustrating thing about this field. You end up with a negative conclusion unless you want to go on and speculate and try to say what it might be. It might be a lot of things, but none of those might-bes are anything conventional, anything that we already know about.”

Several people then wanted to know whether NICAP intended to submit the findings and the film to the Federal Government for further study into the phenomenon.

“Through a conference such as this,” said Acuff, “we certainly bring it to the

attention of government and we do this because serving on the board of NICAP is Senator Barry Goldwater. We will be working with Barry to get this data into the proper hands within government, but we have seen time after time on strong UFO cases that the Federal Government says it has no interest.

“We also know that the Federal Government is still receiving classified messages on UFOs and that they are giving these messages the highest level of distribution — to the White House, the Secretary of Defence, the Secretary of State, the CIA and NSA, and these messages are being withheld from the public.

“We don’t know what the reason is. We just know that that is their attitude on UFO cases. So I wouldn’t have any strong feeling that the government will say, ‘okay we’re going to reopen research into UFOs.’ This is what we would like to see happen, but I don’t know that it would.”

The New York press conference, 26 March 1979. The author, left, Jack Acuff, former president of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), and Dr Bruce Maccabee.

Two days later, when I travelled to Washington to spend a couple of days at the Acuffs’ home before returning to Australia, I was to see copies of some of the messages Acuff had spoken about at the conference. They had been leaked to NICAP from various people in government who felt the public should know what was going on. One particular case, involving a UFO and Iranian Air Force jets in September 1976, had been released to the public

through the Freedom of Information Act as a result of publication by NICAP. And, as Acuff told the conference, the messages had gone to the White House, the Secretaries of State and Defence, and the intelligence agencies. When Acuff showed me those files, I believe that for the first time I really began to grasp the significance of the UFO question, especially in regard to the United States. From what I was able to deduce, and from conversations with other people while I was in the US, it seemed apparent that the American authorities wanted to keep the lid on UFOs, because they did not know what they were. These mysterious objects were apparently travelling through American air space at will, buzzing military bases and missile sites and, in spite of the Americans' advanced technology, they could do nothing about it. That sort of impotence is not something that a world super-power wants to brag about. So it would seem logical for the authorities either to ignore UFOs, or to belittle reported sightings. That, in turn, casts doubt on the credibility of the witnesses. Of course, there is always the possibility that the authorities know the true nature of the UFO phenomenon. Maybe that is the reason for the obvious cover-up.

But I digress. Let me take you back to the press conference, which lasted for about two hours. We were all extremely pleased with the turnout and much of the praise for this must go to the channel's news director, Eddie Dean, who spent hours on the phone informing the New York media about the event. Channel O almost missed out on covering the conference for their own news program because, according to Dean, they had been under the impression that the ABC would cover the conference for its own news service. Channel O had hoped to take a split off that. The ABC, however, was quite happy with the Good Morning America segment and decided against sending a news crew to the conference. I suggested to Dean that we hire a crew of our own but he said the channel was not prepared to pay out $500, which was the going rate for a freelance crew. I tried to impress upon Dean that we had an obligation to our viewers to cover the story; after all, it was Channel O's story. Everyone would be watching the news, waiting for the film report, and there would be nothing! As I pointed out, we would all look bloody silly. I think I got the message through because, after a hurried phone call to Melbourne, Dean came back with the news that we could hire a crew after all. Unfortunately, someone at the channel decided against satellite-feeding the

report back to Australia and opted for airfreight instead. The film got lost in transit and finally went to air three weeks after the conference.

But in the post-conference euphoria these minor problems were quickly forgotten. Dean, Lee and myself knew that we had done our best and that we had succeeded. For me, it was a day of vindication. My credibility as a journalist and a person had been restored. Or so I thought then. My only regret was that I did not have Sue and the boys there with me to help savour the sweet taste of victory.

The conference had sparked interest among other sections of the news media who did not attend and later that night I did a five-minute live interview on NBC news in New York, followed by a radio interview with Lee Speigel, a well-known author and commentator on the UFO phenomenon. I finished off the day with two phone interviews, one with a Melbourne radio station and the other with Radio Avon in Christchurch, New Zealand. That was an important interview for I knew there was a good chance it would be relayed through the country and that my family in New Zealand, the aircrew and the Crocketts would hear it.

As the clock approached the bewitching hour, three slightly inebriated Channel O employees went to their respective rooms after a splendid victory dinner in the hotel’s restaurant.

Chapter 13: Homeward Bound

The next day Lee and I took an afternoon flight to Washington, DC, and Dean flew off to Iowa to do some business for the channel. We arranged to meet in the Los Angeles International Airport terminal prior to boarding our flight to Melbourne. John and Linda Acuff had kindly offered us the chance to rest up before our 24-hour marathon return journey and we were glad of the peace and quiet of Gaithersburg, a small community on the outskirts of Washington. I was most impressed with Washington and spent a leisurely few hours wandering around. I also got another chance to talk about UFOs on television. John was friendly with Paul Berry, who co-hosts a daily news program on WJLA-TV. Paul had put together a half-hour special when Lee had first taken the film to the US and he was interested to hear what had happened since.

On reflection, we did well in the States as far as publicity was concerned although I am sure we would have done much better if our conference had not clashed with the peace treaty signing. Also, two days later the Three Mile Island nuclear plant scared the pants off the American nation. UFOs had to take a back seat. But there was the Good Morning America segment, the other TV spots, the radio interview with Speigel and, of course, the print media coverage. The conference even made the *New York Times* which, I was told, was quite an achievement as that august journal does not normally concern itself with UFO stories. We also knew that the representatives of some of America's biggest-selling weekly and monthly publications had attended the conference, which would mean on-going publicity in the weeks and months ahead.

While I was at the Acuffs' home I did another long interview with Maccabee who was interested in recapping on the latter part of the film that showed a red, orange and white pulsating light. On my taped commentary towards the end of the flight I had mentioned an object that fell quite a distance and then began rolling and turning. I mentioned also that there was orange and red

among the lights. Bruce wanted to establish whether my commentary corresponded with what had been captured on film. He was particularly interested in this part of the film because it showed a light source that pulsated in a regular cycle. In fact, David had captured 31 regular pulsations on one unbroken segment of film and from a scientific point of view Maccabee found that extremely exciting.

Also, for the first time, I told Maccabee about the “presence” on board the Argosy soon after we had turned back on course. Initially I was reluctant to discuss it since it was something extremely personal. Very few people knew that something unusual apparently had occurred on that segment of the flight and I kept quiet about it deliberately because I did not want the media to get hold of it. I knew it would be sensationalised and that the case as a whole would suffer. I preferred not to say anything about it, at least until after the press conference. If it had been mentioned there, the scientific aspect of the investigation would have suffered and we would have been back to the “little green men” syndrome.

Bruce confessed that he was also concerned that the media might latch on to the story. His worry was that at some future date I would be quoted talking about a “presence” and that when he was approached for a follow-up comment he would be left in the invidious position of not being aware of all the facts. He said that to a sceptical media it would appear that I had come up with a new angle just to keep the story alive. Any change or addition at a later date, he said, could weaken the case considerably. So I told him everything and he taped it for the record.

Lee and I flew out of Washington on Thursday afternoon, 29 March, to pick up our flight at LA airport. I was very keen to get back to Melbourne to see what sort of reaction the press conference had provoked in Australia.

Chapter 14: A Critical Silence

I arrived back in Australia to find that the story was a slow-burner. One Melbourne paper gave the conference a half-page spread on page three. Another gave it about one column inch. The two other papers sold in the city on a daily basis did not even mention it. Only a few weeks earlier those same papers had devoted plenty of space to the critics but now the evidence was there to refute the many and varied theories, the media generally did not want to know. Also, I feel that those at the channel who had made the decision not to satellite-feed the film back must take some of the blame for the lack of interest shown in the conference. The channel even promoted the story for the news program on the Thursday night, three days after the conference, and the ratings jumped in anticipation. But the film was still lost somewhere between New York and Melbourne and, as I mentioned earlier, it did not get to air until three weeks after the event.

Luckily there were some people at the channel who realised the importance of the story and in the first week back I did an hour of live television on four talk shows. There were also radio interviews and a couple of magazine articles. These, in turn, sparked more interest and over the next couple of months the story slowly found its way around the country. I was also interviewed by an American film crew from the *In Search Of* television series who came to Australia to follow up the story.

Although the critics were now noticeable by their silence, there was one who wanted to continue the fight – amateur astronomer Robert Lanigan-O'Keeffe. Evidently he had not been at all impressed by Maccabee's findings, nor by the fact that 20 other scientists and experts had given their support. He remained firmly convinced that the whole thing was a hoax and that the film we had shown on television was of Jupiter and its four moons.

I had my first personal brush with Lanigan-O'Keeffe during a live television talk show in my first week back. The program emanated from Melbourne and Lanigan-O'Keeffe took part by telephone from Sydney. I was hoping to get

him to say on air that I was a hoaxer and a liar, which would have given me grounds to sue him for slander. But he would not rise to the bait and was more interested in trotting out his shaky theories. A few days later I was presented with another chance when we were both interviewed by a Sydney radio station. Again he was careful not to make his claims too strongly in public. But he later wrote a letter to the radio station, which was forwarded to me. In that letter, Lanigan-O'Keeffe said he would be releasing his scientific paper, "with the only consolation possible," on 1 May. He said he had also written to Sir Reginald Ansett, the man who then controlled Channel O, and he was sure that Sir Reg would "squash the UFO debate" in view of the evidence he had presented.

But perhaps the most significant part of that letter to the radio station was this sentence: "I have reached the deepest part of my research and I can now show that the film released is a hoax!" He had put it in writing! I was extremely angry and I decided it was time I had a few words with Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe. I rang him at his Sydney home and gave him a tongue-lashing. Although I knew I had enough evidence to win a slander suit, I really did not relish the thought of going through a court action. I just wanted to be left alone. In a further attempt to deter his crusade against me, I pleaded with him to get his paper published. I told him I could then sue any publishing house foolish enough to print it. I hoped I had heard the last of Lanigan-O'Keeffe but I was to have further communication with him, and one phone conversation in particular was most illuminating.

It was during a visit to Sydney where I had gone to do some rewriting on an article I had submitted to Australian *Playboy*. I found I had some time on my hands so I thought it could not possibly hurt to try for the last time to convince Lanigan-O'Keeffe that he was completely and hopelessly out of touch with the reality of the situation. Foolishly, I decided to take a less emotive approach. As soon as Lanigan-O'Keeffe realised this, he took the offensive. It was obvious he thought it was time he got his own back for the nasty things I had said to him. I can assure you that when this gentleman is in full flight, it is pretty hard to stop him. I did, however, get him to admit the reason for his crusade against me. He said Leonard Lee had intimidated him and that had provided the spur for continuing his inquiry. When I mentioned Maccabee's findings and the fact that 20 other people had backed them, he

was not impressed. Evidently he did not have much time for those who had graduated from, as he put it, “American football universities.” I realised then that Lanigan-O’Keeffe considered himself to be David fighting Goliath and that any further conversations were pointless. So I hung up. Incidentally, he did release his so-called “scientific paper” and sent copies to a number of organisations, including NICAP and the Smithsonian Institute. As far as I am aware, it provoked no reaction whatsoever.

Perhaps before I close the chapter on Lanigan-O’Keeffe, I should mention one other apparent reason for his zeal in perpetrating his baseless assumptions. Ben Sandilands, the Sydney newspaper reporter who gave Lanigan-O’Keeffe so many column inches, told me that the amateur astronomer intended to submit his paper to a competition being run by a British magazine, the *New Scientist*, and was hoping to take out the first prize of £1000. The competition was indeed won by a UFO sceptic, but not Lanigan-O’Keeffe.

On 20 April I resigned from the channel, mainly to get this book written, and also to get out of the public spotlight.

Sadly, my relationship with the Crocketts had reached an all-time low. I received another letter from their lawyer to say that they had come to a decision, and I quote: “Mr Fogarty’s terms of partnership are unacceptable. Our clients would only consider a binding partnership if he is prepared to put up £2000 towards expenses, to be forwarded to New Zealand as soon as possible.” The letter then went on to say that if those terms were unacceptable then the Crocketts no longer considered they were bound by any partnership, but they were prepared to pay me for my work and “to consider expenses” where details were provided. The letter concluded: “Mr and Mrs Crockett are not prepared to sell sole rights to Channel O with regard to the documentary. Our clients would prefer to negotiate direct with Channel O’s solicitors and would want any payment from that quarter forwarded direct to them.” In other words, I was being cut out of the deal completely. Not surprisingly, that letter left a sour taste in my mouth.

I did not expect to hear from the Crocketts again and I had given up the possibility of getting any money from the documentary. I was not very happy about that since I had been counting on the money to pay the bills that had been mounting up, mainly for phone calls and legal expenses. I knew the

Crockets had tried to sell the film to the American television crew from the In Search Of series, but the producer had not been too impressed. From what she said it was evident that David had changed the original format and had dropped my commentary and had got himself a new voice-over man. Also, the channel had just about run out of patience and intended to send David a letter stating that if he did not agree to the settlement by a certain date, they would withdraw their offer.

I learnt that David intended to bring the film to Melbourne to try to settle the issue. He was due in Sydney on 11 May and planned to travel down to Melbourne from there. I waited at home expecting a call, either from David or the channel, to say that he had arrived but I heard nothing. Finally, on Thursday, 17 May, I phoned the channel and, much to my surprise, I was told that David had just arrived and was about to discuss the sale of the film with two executives. I asked that he be put on the line because I wanted to find out what his plans were. He seemed slightly annoyed that I had caught up with him and I was to discover later that he had arrived in Melbourne the night before and was obviously hoping to get the sale completed without me. He confirmed this on the phone by saying that I had no rights to the film, nor to any negotiations regarding its sale, although he repeated the offer made in his lawyer's letter that he was prepared to pay my expenses. When I pointed out that there was no way he could sell the film without my approval, he said, "we'll see about that."

I then spoke to Michael Schildberger, who had taken over the running of the newsroom from Eddie Dean, and asked whether the channel intended to stick by the original offer which involved both David and me, or whether they were going to negotiate with David on his own. Schildberger assured me that any deal would be on the basis of the original agreement put up by the channel. He must have told David the same thing because about 10 minutes later the phone rang and the channel's finance director wanted to know if separate cheques would be okay. The next day, 18 May, more than three months after David and I agreed to sell our documentary to the channel, we signed on the dotted line and went our separate ways.

It was exactly 138 days since we had stumbled upon those UFOs off the New Zealand coast. They were 138 days of hassles, mental and physical strain, rumour, soured friendships and, very occasionally, a little bit of happiness.

I certainly got myself a world scoop, but at a price.

Chapter 15: Maccabee's Findings

When the first draft of this book was completed, in the autumn of 1979, the major part of Dr Maccabee's investigation had still to be published. His conclusion that we had seen and filmed a genuine unidentified flying object was, of course, made public at the New York press conference and in conversation with Maccabee I obtained further information. During the writing of the first section of this book, I used every fact and scrap of information about the case that I could lay my hands on. But it was not until about three months, after I had completed the manuscript that Maccabee sent me a copy of all the work he had done on the case. In an accompanying letter he pointed out that it was not to be considered a final report but "rather as a working paper which informs the public about what has been done." He said that parts of the paper had been published in the United States, mainly in UFO publications, and that the technical sections would be published in a specialised UFO periodical.

Part of Maccabee's findings was also published in an American technical journal, *Applied Optics*. That article dealt with the photometric properties of the UFO we saw and filmed on the climb out of Christchurch. Surprisingly, the article prompted a reply from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) in New Zealand. The DSIR is the official scientific body of the New Zealand government and, as such, was involved in the original air force "investigation" which decided that everything we saw and filmed that morning (and the events of 21 December) were the result of "natural but unusual atmospheric phenomena." At the time, the government said there would be no further comment. As mentioned earlier, I was told by an official spokesman that we could "safely assume" we had filmed Venus. So I was most surprised to hear that the DSIR had re-entered the fray. According to Maccabee, two DSIR employees, Bill Ireland and Mike Andrews, had written a letter to *Applied Optics* arguing that the UFO filmed near Christchurch was in fact a squid fishing boat. So much for their earlier theory that it was Venus! Maybe someone from the department had checked and found that

Venus did not rise until after we had finished filming. In December 1979, Ireland published a more detailed DSIR report. That report will be discussed in the next chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of parts of Maccabee's most recent work and to clarify and expand on points that were covered in the first section.

The title of Maccabee's paper is *"What Really Happened in New Zealand."*

In his paper, Maccabee describes the events of 31 December as one of the few, or perhaps the *only*, radar-visual-photographic UFO sightings. Certainly, he says, it is the only sighting during which an on-the-spot recording (my taped commentary) has been made. He says the amount of photographic data is considerable, even immense, and that so far only the simplest sorts of analyses have been attempted on the several thousand frames of colour film that contain usable images. He says that eventually the film will be subjected to sophisticated analysis in an effort to determine the sizes, shapes and brightness of the various light sources. He says this one case is like sending a man to the moon: he brings back several pounds of rocks and those rocks keep scientists working for years to find out what the rocks mean to our understanding of the moon, the solar system and cosmology in general.

Maccabee saw the original film for the first time on 8 January 1979, eight days after the sightings. He said it took him "almost four microseconds" to realise that he was not looking at Venus, or mating mutton birds, or light reflected from a cabbage patch. By the end of the third week in January he had decided the film really did show something unusual and he told Leonard Lee, confidentially, that on a scale of 1-10, the probability that we had filmed a UFO (something that could not be identified) was about 11.

Technical details

The plane, a four-engine turbo prop Argosy freighter, left Wellington at 11.46 pm on 30 December 1978 and landed at Christchurch at 1.01 am on 31 December. The weather was excellent for flying with no noticeable departure from a standard temperature lapse from ground level to 14,000 feet, which was the cruising altitude. There were low clouds over Wellington and visibility of about 60 kilometres over the sea. The wind speed at the cruising altitude was estimated to be no more than 10-15 knots from the west and the

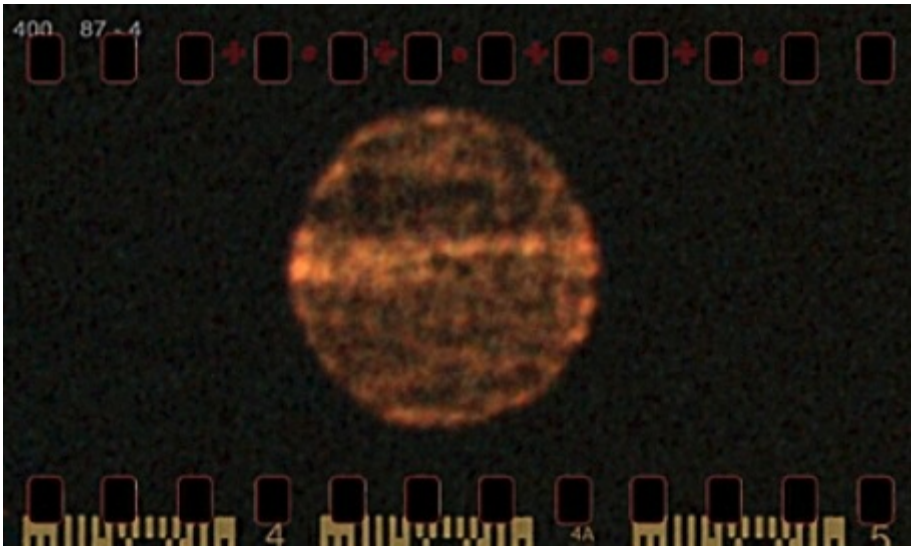
atmospheric conditions were sufficiently steady to allow the operation of the automatic pilot and automatic height control. There were no noticeable inversion effects on Wellington Radar. The air speed of the plane when climbing was 155-180 knots and 215 knots at the cruising altitude.

David Crockett was using a Bolex H16, EBM electric 16 millimetre reflex camera, operated at 24 frames per second, and a Kern, vario swita 16-100 millimetre zoom lens at f/1.9. The camera has a rotating sector focal plane shutter just in front of the film and the sector was open for 160° out of 360°. The film was Fujicolor type 8425, 16 millimetre, ASA 400 color reversal, standard development.

The radar equipment at the Wellington air traffic control centre was a Marconi 264, 50cm (587 MHz), 500 kilowatts, with some adaptions for use at Wellington. Targets with radial velocities in excess of 15 knots are detected in the MTI (moving target indicator) mode, with phase shift and digital scan summing electronics. Observations on known targets with and without MTI processing indicate that the MTI processing improves the sensitivity of the radar. Strong targets in the MTI mode may be weak, or even non-existent, in the non-MTI mode. The Christchurch radar was a Marconi 264, 50 cm, 50 kw. The MTI capability was similar but not as sophisticated as Wellington. There was also a cone of invisibility extending outward from the antenna that rose at a rate of 100 feet per mile, beneath which targets could not be seen under ordinary atmospheric conditions.

The technical details for the trip north from Christchurch to Blenheim were much the same, with some exceptions. Again the weather was excellent for flying. There was possibly a cloud bank more than 40 miles east of the South Island, low cloud cover (1200 to 3000 feet) above Christchurch and scattered low cloud over the ocean. The cruising altitude for the return leg was 13,000 feet. Crockett used the same camera but this time he was filming at ten frames per second and he also used a Sun Macro-Zoom, 80-240 millimetre lens at f/4. Maccabee says this lens was later found to be out of adjustment. At full zoom, objects at “infinity” came into focus when the focus ring read 15 feet and distant objects were out of focus when the ring read “infinity.” Maccabee says this may explain the section of film which shows a large, dim image (see photo section) which then contracts to a bright, much smaller image and then expands again to a dim, large image, accompanied by an

apparent symmetry inversion of the out-of-focus image.



The large beachball-shaped image. Dr Maccabee believes it was simply an out of focus image of the object filmed north of Christchurch.

The plane left Christchurch at 2.16 am and landed at Blenheim at about 3.10 am. On the return trip the aircraft's own radar was also used and it was an M.E.L. Equipment Co. EL90 series, 3 cm (9375 MHz), 15 kw. It had no MTI capability and was operated in the "map mode" which produces a fan-shaped beam extending from 3° to about 15° below the centerline of the aircraft.

Light sources

Maccabee also lists the artificial and natural light sources in the area at the time of the sightings. He says that Jupiter was visible in the north-east, magnitude about minus 2.0; Saturn was also visible in the north-east, magnitude about 0.0; Venus was visible in the east after about 3 .00 am at the altitude of the plane, magnitude about minus 4.3, except on the horizon where atmospheric extinction reduced its brightness by a factor of 100 or more. There were stars and other astronomical sources visible in the clear sky but all were dimmer than Jupiter. No comets, meteors, or aurora were reported. Maccabee notes that Bob Guard pointed out Venus to the passengers near the end of the flight north, and I can vouch for this.

The artificial lights listed by Maccabee include city lights, flashing and steady coastal and airport beacons, with flashing or rotating periods ranging from about 1.5 seconds (flashing only red) to 30 seconds (flashing only white). There were also the lights from a Japanese squid fishing fleet that was

more than 200 kilometres east of the South Island and east to south-east of Christchurch. The fleet was picked up by a scanning satellite about 1.00 am on 31 December, about 260 kilometres south-east of Christchurch, and the Royal New Zealand Air Force, according to newspaper reports, put its position at 260 kilometres east of Christchurch during the evening of 2 January. Maccabee points out that a large Japanese fishing boat, carrying 50 4000 watt bulbs, would put out between four million and five million lumens, yielding a luminous intensity of 300,000 to 400,000 candelas (a candela is the international measure of luminous intensity and was formerly expressed in terms of candle-power).

Radar

Maccabee goes into an extensive analysis of the radar sightings, much of it highly technical. I shall mention only some of the less technical aspects. Those who want to follow up Maccabee's findings more thoroughly should go to his website (http://brumac.8k.com).

Geoff Causer, the radar operator at the Wellington air traffic control centre during the sightings, told Maccabee that during the period he was on duty the radar picked up anomalous targets more or less continually. That was from about 11.45 pm on 30 December to four o'clock the following morning. The previous controller had also seen the targets and had pointed them out to Causer. The targets were unusual because generally they did not leave trails on the radarscope, which indicated to the operators that they were stationary. But John Cordy, the operator involved in the 21 December sightings, pointed out to me that the MTI processing was supposed to reject stationary targets.

During the course of Causer's shift, which covered the total period of our sightings, some of the targets would appear on his screen for only one sweep and some remained in fixed positions for many sweeps. In the cases where the target appeared for only one sweep, it would not have been possible to detect any motion, as several sweeps of a target are needed in order to leave a trail. Some targets, however, did leave such trails. One of these was the target responsible for the aircraft return doubling in size for a short time on the trip south. According to Maccabee, that particular target apparently paced the aircraft. Another target that left a consistent trail was observed on the northern sector near Cape Campbell. Causer watched it on two separate

occasions during which time it travelled about 20 miles at speeds ranging from 30 to 60 knots. As Maccabee points out in his paper, that speed seems somewhat excessive for a large fishing boat.

The blips made by the targets were comparable in size and intensity with the returns from the Argosy. But when the MTI mode was removed the targets were not seen and the non-MTI display showed the normal amount of nearby sea and land clutter, and the plane. Maccabee says targets could appear on the MTI display and not on the non-MTI display if they were basically weak targets; for example, if they were not very reflective for the 50 cm radar. He says that even normally strong targets, such as aircraft, can be weak reflectors if they are positioned in such a manner that they present small "cross-sections" for radar reflection. He gives the example of an object which appears as a strong target (relatively large cross-section) on one sweep of the radar scope and then turns between sweeps and presents a relatively weak cross-section, thus becoming a weak target. If the cross-section became too small, the target would "disappear" as far as the radar operator was concerned.

There were a number of sceptics who blamed the strange returns on the atmosphere bending the radar beam. Maccabee goes into great detail to explain why this was not applicable in this case. For instance, he points out that when the atmosphere is sufficiently refractive to bend the beam downward, an unusual amount of land and sea clutter would be visible on the non-MTI display. But when the non-MTI display was checked there were no conditions indicating "anomalous propagation." In later correspondence with Bill Startup, I learned that the radar in use at Wellington had been specially modified to suit local conditions. He wrote: "I understand that the improvement was in the ability to greatly enhance the images when seen on MTI so giving greater contrast as against the rubbish, or trash, caused by atmospherics … suffice to say that the set had been modified for some time and there had been plenty of controller experience with it prior to December 1978."

We now come to the analysis of the radar-visual sightings; that is, where a visual target is seen in the same direction as a radar target. As Maccabee explains, the radar target may not be the same thing as the visual object because the radar operator has no way of estimating altitude when using a

long-range search radar, as in this case. There is also the problem of the visual observer usually being unable to estimate distance. But, says Maccabee, if the visual and radar targets are observed to change in some way, for example, if they move, “appear”, or “disappear” a the same time, then it is reasonable to assume that they are the same object, providing the nature of the change is the same for both types of observation.

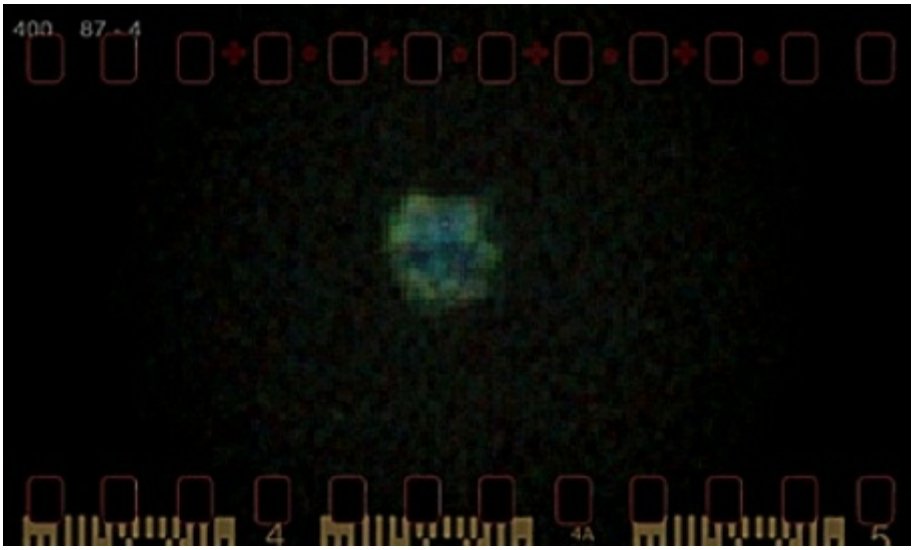
During the 31 December sightings, Maccabee says there were three classes of observations: those in which radar and visual targets, in the same direction with respect to the plane, changed simultaneously (apparent radar-visual); those in which radar and visual were changing in similar ways but for which the exact directions of the visual targets were not known (maybe radar-visual); and those in which there appeared to be no synchronism between radar and visual targets (not radar-visual). Out of 28 separable radar incidents involving the Wellington radar, Maccabee lists four as being radar only, with no possibility of a visual sighting since the targets were behind the aircraft; 12 as radar only even though the targets were in directions where they could have been seen; seven as possible radar-visual sightings; and five as apparent radar-visual sightings.

Film analysis

Maccabee then moves on to the analysis of the film. The first section shows the plane on the ground at Blenheim; the takeoff (filmed by Crockett on the flight deck); shots inside the cockpit; the approach and landing at Wellington; anomalous lights off the Kaikoura coast; the town lights of Kaikoura and some “extraneous” lights; the approach and landing at Christchurch and my stand-up in the control tower at Christchurch. That was recorded about 1.45 am on 31 December, about half an hour before our return trip. Shortly after the section showing the landing at Wellington there are about four feet of clear leader. This was when Crockett removed the film magazine from the camera to enable him to shoot my stand-up soon after our takeoff from Wellington. That stand-up was shot on different film stock so as to conserve our supply of Fujicolor “fast” film. A couple of seconds after the clear leader is the start of the UFO sequence on the downward leg. There are about 230 frames that show a bluish-white object that is basically elliptical, but may have a triangular protrusion. When we first viewed the film at the channel,

after the mad rush to get it across the Tasman Sea from New Zealand, we completely passed over this segment, which was not all that surprising since it lasts for only a few seconds. Also, you have to slow it down, almost frame by frame, to pick up any real detail. There are three separate sections that all show a bluish-white object which suddenly appears in frame and then spins on its axis and, in the space of a couple of frames, disappears completely. Maccabee says these images change in brightness and image size in a matter that suggests Crockett changed his focus as he filmed them. But the range of brightness variation from zero to maximum seems to be greater than can be accounted for just by focal change. So, says Maccabee, it appears that the brightness of the object actually changed.

Just before I leave these bluish-white objects, I should point out something quite strange about some of the images on the film. Soon after my return to the channel in February 1979, Leonard Lee showed me a colour print taken off one frame of the film. It was one of the bluish-white objects and Lee wanted to know if I thought there was anything unusual about it. I was immediately struck by its resemblance to a human face. The face is quite clear and shows shaded areas where the eyes could be, a small nose and a mouth. The face, although human, is also a little animal-like. It gave me quite a start for I had just finished reading one of the books sent to me by a well-meaning Christian which suggested that UFOs were Satan and his demons. The face looked suspiciously like that of a little demon!



One of the blue images that resembled the face of a "little demon."

Later I was to discover other frames that showed face-like images. I do not attach any special significance to these frames and believe they were probably caused by the object's varying degrees of brightness. A more plausible explanation is pareidolia, a psychological phenomenon that is thought to hard-wired in the human brain as a highly evolved survival trait. It suggests we are "programmed" to recognise faces in nonhuman objects. I remember that when Lee first showed me the colour print we both agreed it would be wise not to mention it to too many people. We did not want to jeopardise the scientific inquiry that Maccabee was then undertaking. A story in the popular press about a "face in space" would, we thought, quickly overshadow the scientific aspects of the case.

About seven months later I showed the particular frame to a newspaper reporter who specialises in writing about UFO phenomenon and he, like Lee and I, was quite taken aback by the image. Soon after, he wrote a story with a front-page headline, "Alien Face In Space." In retrospect, I believe Lee and I acted wisely in keeping quiet about the "face." Our action helped to get Maccabee's findings released without the sensationalism that normally accompanies UFO stories.

There are another 200 or so frames on the first section of the film that show the lights of Kaikoura, although they are very faint. There are other lights above the town that flash on and off and, after viewing the film many times, I am convinced they are the lights we saw in a row at the very start of our sightings. This sequence is so dim that it can be viewed satisfactorily only when the film is put on to an editing machine and the image studied with a magnifying glass. This first section has only about 10 feet showing UFOs, out of a total of 263 feet. The remainder of the film contained images that were easy to analyse. Other light sources, such as the airport and the city lights, were used to calibrate the film, the camera and the plane's windows in terms of light sensitivity, colour and distortion.

The film obtained on the flight back to Blenheim was, of course, the real scoop. It shows the takeoff at Christchurch, again filmed by Crockett from inside the aircraft, an anomalous light near Cape Campbell and the landing approach at Blenheim. A total of 148 feet was shot, including 4518 frames (113 feet) of the light source near Christchurch and 279 frames (7 feet) near Cape Campbell, which shows an anomalous light which fluctuates rapidly

from bright white (when the film is saturated), to combinations of dim red and orange, or just dim red. Maccabee says a single viewing of this piece of film is sufficient to convince a photo analyst that the “best” was saved for last. I will go into more detail about this segment a little later, but first I would like to touch on Maccabee’s investigation into the light source filmed while we were still on the climb out of Christchurch.

Initially Crockett used his 100 millimetre lens, mostly at full zoom, except when he pulled back to show the object outside the aircraft and a meter inside the cockpit, both at the same time. It was during this period that Crockett obtained images that were both triangular and elliptical, and also the now famous “lazy eight” frame. There was also a relatively steady segment, compared with the rest of the film, which showed a slightly non-circular image with a protruding green dot that comes and goes. During this segment, the image drifts slowly to the right of frame and Maccabee says this is consistent with the hypothesis that Crockett held the camera steady and allowed the object to drift by his line of sight. The final segment featuring the light source near Christchurch starts with images that are rather thin, dim streaks that indicate a great deal of camera movement. This segment contains the sequence filmed with the 240 millimetre lens and these images start off large (about 2 mm in diameter on film) and then shrink to image diameters around 0.2-0.3 mm, before again expanding to over a millimetre. At the same time, according to Maccabee, the image brightness starts very low, increases dramatically, and then ends up very dim again. There also appears to be a symmetry inversion in the sense that the image “flips over” as it shrinks and then expands. These effects, says Maccabee, are characteristic of “going through focus.” But when I last spoke to Crockett he was adamant that the lens was not out of focus and that the large dim object on the film was very much like the object he saw through the eyepiece. The main difference was the colour. At the time, Crockett described it as greyish white with rings of light going around. On film, the image is reddish brown and the rings of lights that Crockett described appear as jagged, horizontal bands. Maccabee believes the horizontal bands are the result of photographing a distant bright light through a window, at a downward angle, when the lens was out of focus.

People who saw the original news items on television, or have since been

lucky enough to see the entire film at the various public lectures I have given, will know that there is a lot of image movement. Although Maccabee believes it is reasonable to assume that this is due to camera motion, he says one frame pushes this assumption to its limit. That frame is the one that shows the “lazy eight” configuration.

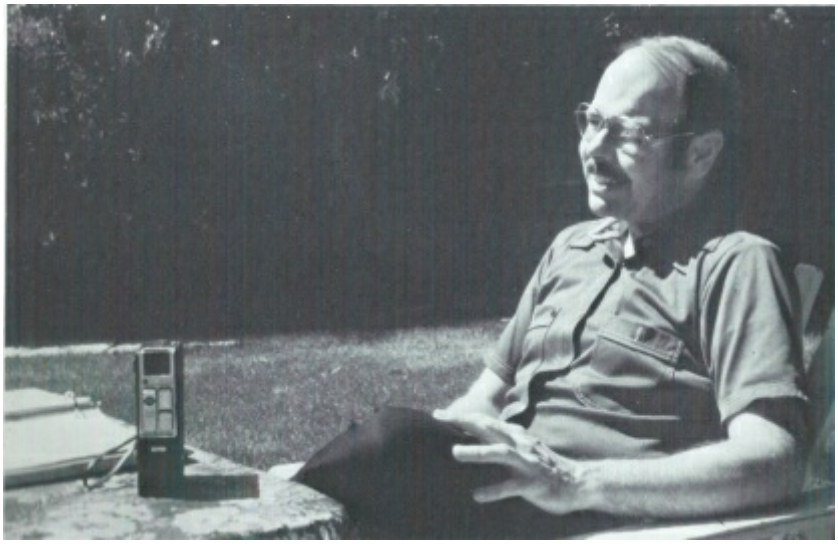
The famous “lazy eight” frame. If the movement were caused by the object itself then it would have travelled about 2500 feet in the duration of that one frame, putting its speed at about 57,000 feet per second!

Maccabee says that considering the mass of the camera and the rotational inertia, especially with a rather long and heavy lens attached, it seems difficult to imagine that the camera would move in the “lazy eight” pattern under normal conditions. Although, he says, it might do so if it were bumped in a certain manner.

Let us assume that the movement was caused by the object itself and that at the time it was 10 nautical miles (the closest it came on the aircraft radar) from the plane. If that were the case, then Maccabee estimates the object travelled a path of about 2500 feet in the duration of that one frame. That would put its speed at about 57,000 feet per second (17,000 metres per second) and would mean that if there were any occupants they would have been subjected to about 80,000 times the force of gravity.

Regardless of whether the streak was caused by the camera or object motion, it is still very bright over its whole length. Maccabee estimates that at a distance of 10 miles the luminous intensity of the object would have been about 250,000 candelas. He says this amount of brightness can be achieved

with a spotlight that focuses the radiation from a bright source into a rather narrow beam. He says, however, that no commercial source can achieve such a luminosity without focusing. As an example, he says that a relatively high efficiency incandescent bulb that uses 10,000 watts (the largest type available) would have a luminous flux of 26,000 candelas. If this amount of luminous flux were then concentrated into a beam about 70° wide, the luminous intensity would be about 300,000 candelas, a value comparable to the luminosity of the object. That would make it an extremely bright light source.



Dr Richard Haines, a research scientist employed by NASA. He was on the scientific panel that verified Dr Maccabee's findings.

In later experiments, Dr Richard Haines tried to duplicate the "lazy eight" image under comparable photographic conditions. Haines chose several stationary reflective domes at the Lick Observatory, southwest of San Jose, California, as his would-be "UFOs." He took a number of photographs of the domes with a hand-held camera while flying in a single-engine aircraft at a nominal speed of 120-145 mph. At the time, the domes were about 10 to 14 miles from the aircraft. The photographs were taken on a clear, sunny day, near noon. The spherical domes each reflected sunlight into the lens as if they were optical point sources. Haines did his best to simulate the conditions that Crockett would have experienced – on one occasion he tried to stabilise the camera as much as possible and, on another occasion, he vibrated it by hand at as high a frequency as possible. He also held the telephoto lens against the

vibrating window. All these attempts to obtain an image similar to the “lazy eight” frame were singularly unsuccessful. When I visited Haines at his home in Los Altos, California, in July 1980, he showed me the photographs and the most complex blur image was “L” shaped and, in some cases, “J” shaped. He was unable to obtain any complex images or even a simple, closed figure.

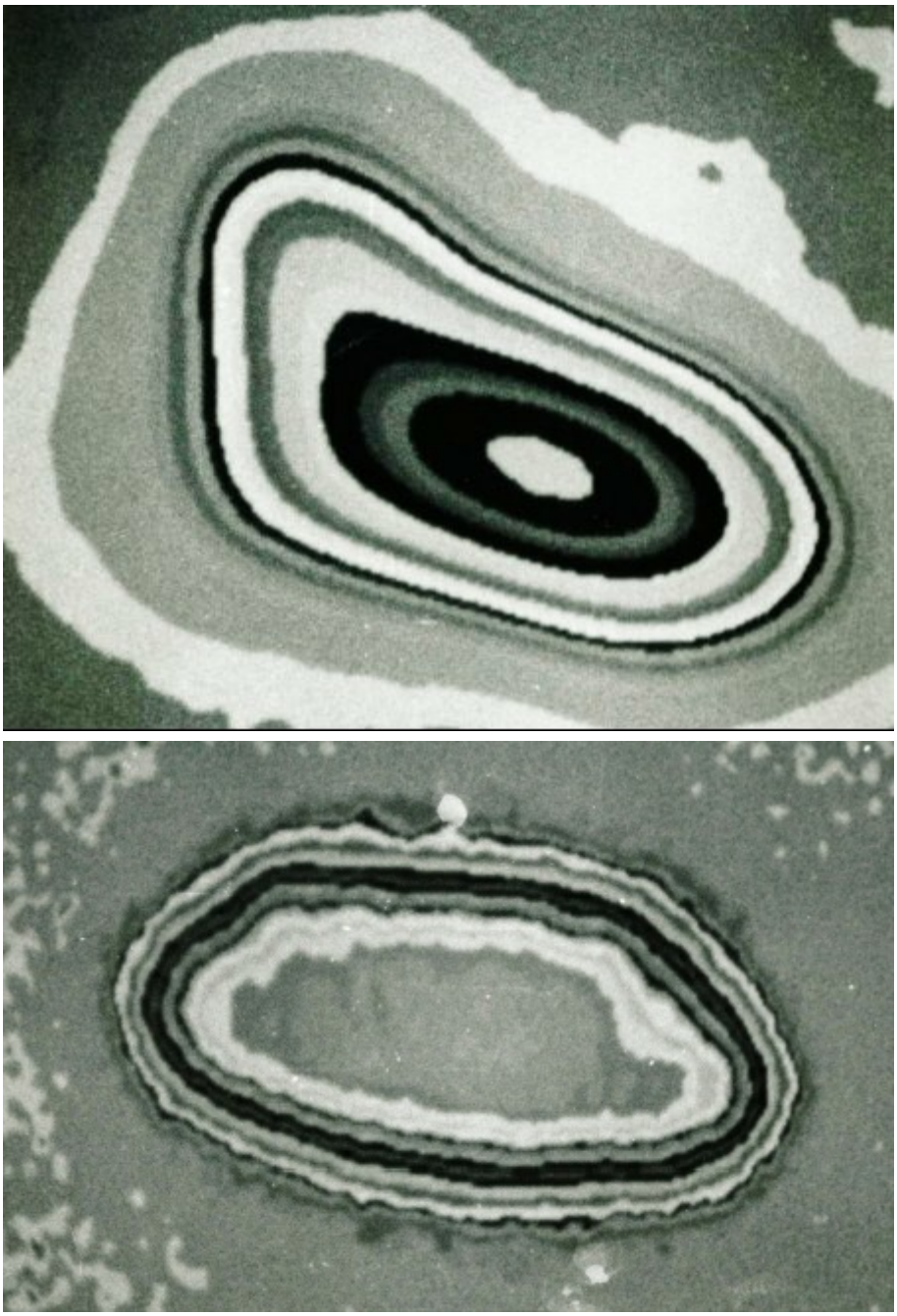
Haines concluded that although a small proportion of the “lazy eight” image was probably due to camera motion, the object itself might well have shifted positions at high speed, “perhaps in a vertical plane oriented approximately toward the aircraft.” He said another particularly intriguing feature of the image was the fact that it was well centred in the frame, that is, the figure eight pattern seemed to end almost where it started. Haines said this explanation was consistent with a point source moving through a 360-degree circle a finite distance from a stationary axis. He said such an image motion could be reproduced quite easily by fixing a small light on the rim of a spinning wagon wheel and photographing one or more complete revolutions while there was a small oscillatory horizontal motion of the camera. Of course, said Haines, all of this would have to be done during a single period of exposure. (NOTE: A more detailed report on Dr Haines’ experiments can be found in Volume 4, *UFO Phenomena*, 1980/1981, published in Bologna, Italy).

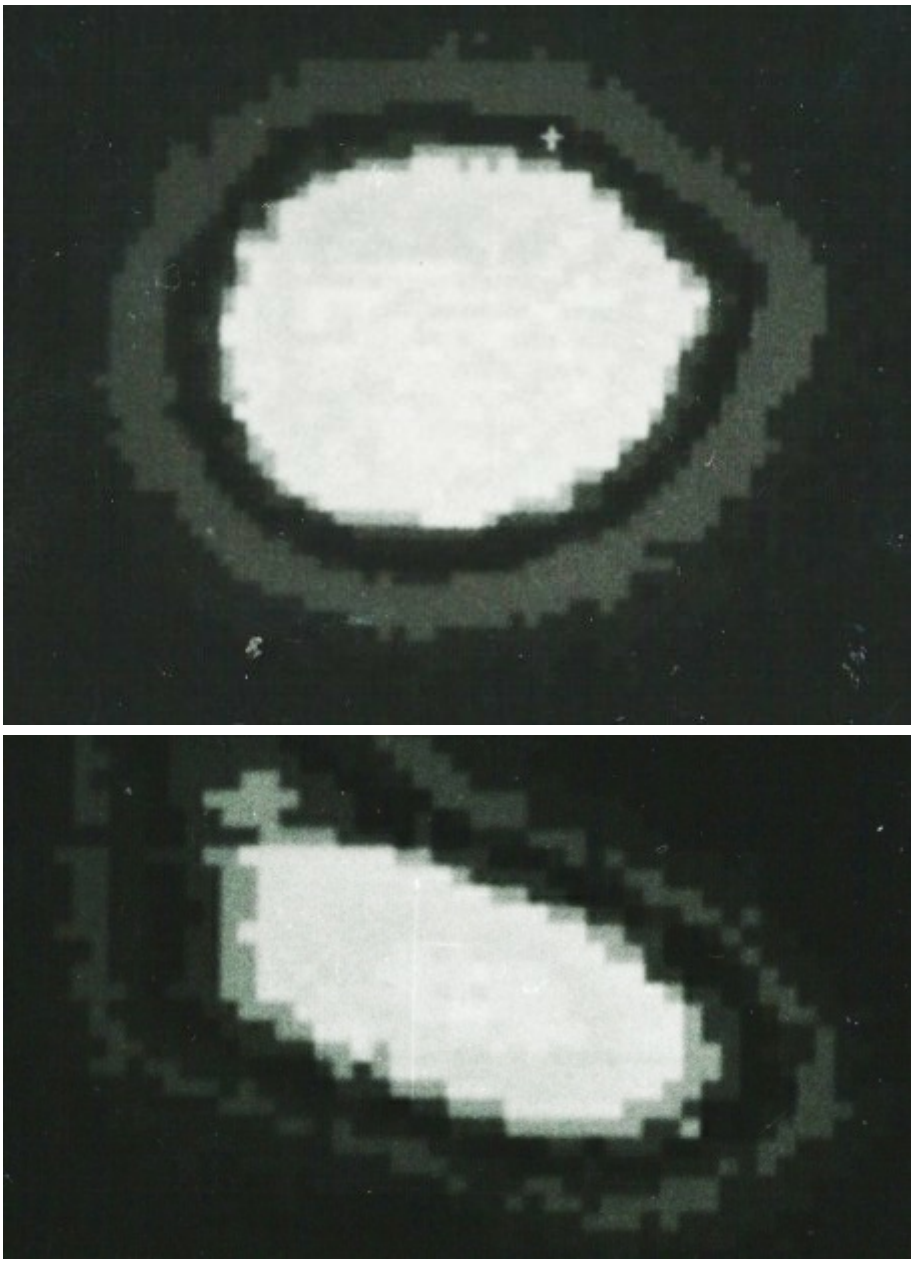
There are 279 frames in the section of film shot near Cape Campbell shortly before the plane landed at Blenheim. As I mentioned earlier, these frames show a light source that fluctuates rapidly from bright white to combinations of dim red and orange, or just red. At the beginning of the sequence, it also appears that the source moved rapidly in an elliptical or oval track and Maccabee believes this matches my description of an object that was “rolling and turning.” One of the most intriguing aspects of this sequence, according to Maccabee, is the brightness-colour oscillation. He says that when the film is run at normal speed it is immediately obvious that the brightness pulsates. When the film is slowed down it is also possible to see that the shape of the images changes. This cannot be detected at normal running speed because the source decreases from very bright to dim in less than 0.4-0.5 second. Maccabee says that when the film is slowed down, or viewed frame by frame, one is struck by the speed with which the source can go from dim to bright. Sometimes it changes from dim red to bright white in consecutive frames. He

was also struck by the repeated occurrence of a particular colour-shape configuration when the source was dim. He describes this as a triangular shape consisting of two red dots as the base and an orange dot as the apex. I have since viewed the original film to find these particular configurations and they are quite startling. (See images, Chapter 4 Encore.)

Perhaps I should also mention the apparent “time warp” which occurred after we turned towards the object on the flight north. The time discrepancy still has not been satisfactorily explained and Maccabee says the times and the estimated path of the plane are all subject to revision.

Computer-enhanced images





These computer-enhanced images confirm that the main object, filmed north of Christchurch, had definite shape and form and varying levels of brightness.

Chapter 16: The Debunkers

The New Zealand government, contrary to its stated intention in January 1979 that it would not be making any further comment on the case, continued to make pronouncements during the year. This culminated in a report by Bill Ireland, of the DSIR's Physics and Engineering Laboratory, which was released in December 1979. Titled, "*Unfamiliar Observations of Lights in the Night Sky"*, the report covers not only the sightings of 21 and 31 December, but many other reports of strange lights in the New Zealand sky from 20 December to 10 January 1979. The report suggests that the lights "were generally unusual views of either terrestrial sources, such as lighthouses, navigation beacons and city lights, or of the planets Venus and Jupiter, seen through an unusually clear atmosphere." The sighting from the Argosy as we climbed out of Christchurch was, according to Ireland, "most likely a squid boat seen under quite normal viewing conditions."

Apart from the fact that this theory differs markedly from the DSIR's original Venus hypothesis, one wonders whether Captain Startup could fly over a fishing boat without realising what it was. After all, he had been flying for more than 20 years and had previously joined other pilots in tracking foreign boats suspected of violating New Zealand's fishing zone. There are other very good reasons why Ireland's hypothetical fishing boat must be discarded as a possible explanation for the light source we saw and filmed, and these are discussed later.

Ireland's report is one of supposition, suggestion and guesswork and contains some glaring errors. I can only hope that these were not deliberate. For example, in dealing with the radar-visual sightings involving Captain Vern Powell on the morning of 21 December, Ireland makes the following comment: "About the time of this sighting of a light from the aircraft, the Wellington radar was also picking up a return which apparently tracked and kept pace with the aircraft for about 19km. The aircrew did *not* (author's emphasis) identify the light to be coming from the position of the 'object'

showing on the Wellington radar." That statement is at complete variance with the facts! When I interviewed Captain Powell nine days after his sighting he told me that Wellington radar had, in fact, directed him to the position of the target showing up on their scope. He said:

"We were in contact with Wellington radar. They asked us to identify certain returns that they had on their screens and so they asked us, when we were free, had time to spare, to identify what they had on their screens … and to the right of us they had about five returns about 12 miles. So we looked out that way and there was nothing there at all.

"It was a clear sky but we couldn't see anything. We put our radar on and we picked up a boat return a little bit to the front of us, to the right, and on the water we could see a light and so we confirmed that as a boat … and the same again another one slightly more to the left of that, virtually straight ahead of us, which we also had on our radar, which is a weather radar, but we using it for tracking purposes, and that confirmed as a boat.

"And then he said he had a strong return to our port about nine o'clock, directly on our left-hand side and both the first officer, Ian Pirie, and myself looked out and Ian first of all saw it and said 'goodness, look at that,' or words to that effect, and there was a massive bright light slightly ahead of our port wing out to the left of us … we couldn't really see how far away it was from us, but it was out to the left of us."

A little later into the interview, I asked Powell to tell me about the incident when the object followed the plane down the coast.

"Yes, radar told us about this. We leveled out at 10,000 feet and looked out and it was still there and I said it was in the same place to radar, which it shouldn't have been. I thought if it was something stationary because they said they had something hovering in that area and then they told us that it had been following us for a period of time … it was tracking us."

As further evidence of this remarkable radar-visual incident, let me refer to the log kept by the radar operators at the Wellington air traffic control centre. Ireland refers to this log throughout his report but fails to mention the following relevant entry for the morning of 21 December. "Time, 0328. Subject, More UFOs!!: SAF BM-CH [Argosy flight, Blenheim to Christchurch] saw a bright red light definitely airborne 2-3000 ft higher than

the A/C [aircraft]. SRE [Wellington radar] also shows an echo to the east of the Argosy by 23 [miles]. This target was seen *both* visually by the A/C and on SRE to keep pace with the aircraft southbound for 12 miles." (Emphasis added).

Ireland also fails to mention that the target showing on the Wellington scope, and observed visually by the aircrew, was the same target that had earlier been tracked, by the Wellington operators for 30 miles, at a speed of 120 knots, before coming to a halt and remaining stationary for about three-quarters of an hour. The target was observed continuously on radar for at least three hours and during that time it made approaches to two aircraft, following one down the coast for 12 miles. The following transcript of part of the actual radio messages between Wellington radar and Argosy SAF that morning does, I believe, further establish the credibility of those involved in the 21 December sightings. At the same time, it shows how officialdom is careful to select only that information which suits its purpose.

RADAR: Ten o'clock to you, range 30 miles, is a large target. This one tracked down from Wellington … we saw it first of all about 30 miles out from Wellington … it tracked down to 60 miles and has remained stationary for about three-quarters of an hour and has now moved about 20 miles to the west.

PLANE: We have a bright red glowing light out to our 10 o'clock position … hard to say what range it is, but it's definitely airborne.

Ireland came to the conclusion that the object seen by Powell and Pirie was Venus! But he would surely have found that theory hard to justify if he had taken into account the extraordinary manoeuvres of the object as seen on the radarscope. Perhaps that is why he failed to mention them in his report.

Ireland also chose to ignore the other highlight of the 21 December sightings, namely the incident as Powell's Argosy approached Christchurch airport. That was when the crew picked up a fast-moving object on their own radar. Powell later estimated its speed at about 10,000 miles per hour. The target came straight towards the aircraft before suddenly veering off the radar screen. At the same time, the crew saw a bright flashing light. Could it be that since there was no conventional explanation for this incident it was omitted from the report?

Ireland's "most likely" explanations for the events of 31 December are also suspect from both a scientific and a factual point of view. Perhaps this stems from his reliance on newspaper accounts for much of his information. Unfortunately, many of those reports were inaccurate. Also, Ireland spoke to only some of the principal witnesses and, as Maccabee points out, one would expect that for such an investigation he would have spent more time talking to the main participants.

Ireland claims that the lights of Christchurch cannot be ruled out as sources of the lights reported on the downward flight. Maccabee says the available information indicates otherwise. To start with, the lights were seen in the direction of Kaikoura and at times appeared to light up the foreshore. The lights were also much brighter than the lights of Kaikoura. As Maccabee says, the inverse square law and atmospheric extinction effects on light intensity make the Christchurch lights hypothesis unreasonable, and he points out that when the lights were first seen, Kaikoura was about 85 kilometres away and Christchurch about 240 kilometres from the plane. The inverse square law, he says, would make the lights of Christchurch appear about eight times dimmer than comparable Kaikoura lights.

Also, Ireland's explanation fails to account for the three bluish-white objects filmed by Crockett. Maccabee points out that the first of these lights is definitely at the right side of the aircraft because the image on the film is seen to slide rapidly to the right of screen and several seconds later the cockpit is seen to slide on to the screen from the left. The two other lights were filmed with no apparent reference to the inside of the plane. Maccabee has analysed two frames from that first section of film and says the focused image is quite bright, indicating good exposure of the film. He says the required intensity of a light at Christchurch that could produce such an exposure would be about 8000 million candelas, a value perhaps comparable to the whole of Christchurch taken as one source. Maccabee concludes: "Thus it appears that both the visual descriptions and photographic evidence are inconsistent with the hypothesis that the 'UFO' lights were actually lights from Christchurch."

Another significant event on the downward leg was the flashing light observed off the right wingtip. I referred to it at the time as looking like a "very faint star, but then it emits a very bright white and green light." Ireland argues that this light may have been the Point Keen lighthouse at the

easternmost tip of the Kaikoura Peninsula. He says that if this series of sightings is to be ascribed to a UFO, then “the absence of the light(s) from Point Keen and Kaikoura for over six minutes must be agreed to by the witnesses.” According to Maccabee, the co-pilot, Bob Guard, has already stated that he could see the Kaikoura town lights during this particular sighting. Since the release of Ireland’s report, Captain Startup and Guard have tested his lighthouse hypothesis during a similar flight. They say that in spite of careful observations only about two flashes were seen that could be attributed to the Point Keen light. These observations were made during trips north and south along the same flight path. Guard has also stated that the Point Keen light was not what he saw on 31 December 1978. Finally, the light we saw that morning was both green and white and was observed for between two and four minutes. By Ireland’s own admission, the Point Keen light flashes only white, not white and green, and comes on only twice every 15 seconds, the duration of each flash being two seconds.

Ireland suggests that the white, orange and red light (or lights) filmed towards the end of the journey could have been the lights at the entrance to Wellington Harbour and he makes special reference to the front harbour light because it is a “quick flashing white light with an intensity of more than 2400 candelas in the direction of the aircraft.” That is not completely correct since the front harbour light does have a section radiating 2400 candelas but that is directed north, not south. The section radiating south has an intensity of 7000 candelas. Because the aircraft was south-west of the harbour, the radiation in that direction is naturally of interest.

Unfortunately for Ireland the extra radiation to the south does not help his case at all. To start with, if the light were radiating according to the published specifications, then the illuminated area never intercepted the path of the aircraft. Also, the light flashes only white and not white to red and orange as it appears on the film. Maccabee says that in order to determine whether or not the light suggested by Ireland, or any light around Wellington, could have made the photographic images, it is necessary to make another brightness comparison. At the time the film was taken, the aircraft was about 122 kilometres from Wellington. If the front harbour light were responsible for the images on the film then it would need to have been radiating an intensity 175,000 times greater than it is capable of doing. Maccabee says that even if

the harbour light had been photographed from the closest position of the aircraft, before it turned on its final approach into Blenheim, the light would need to have been radiating about nine million candelas!

I would also light to touch briefly on Ireland's claim that the light source we filmed on the first part of the journey north was "most likely a squid boat seen under quite normal viewing conditions." In a letter to me on 4 January 1980, Maccabee states: "New and re-evaluated information tends to blow Ireland's squid boat out of the water. Of course, the fact that he was not able to find such a boat did not help him at all ... but at least he was scientifically honest enough to state that fact even though it contradicts his hypothesis." In his report, Ireland makes this statement: "The squid boat records did not reveal that a boat was fishing near the position of this UFO sighting on the morning of 31 December. However, this does not mean that no such boat could have been there, considering that if it had been fishing it could well have been doing so illegally. In such circumstances, it does not appear surprising that there is no record of any known boat fishing there at that time."

It should be borne in mind that foreign fishing boats can fish legally so long as they stay outside the 12-mile limit and their owners report their positions at specified times. Ireland argues that a squid boat did not report its position because it was fishing illegally, that is, within the 12-mile limit. All the evidence, however, even that advanced by Ireland, puts the light source outside the 12-mile limit. Therefore, there would be no reason for the boat not to report its position, which leads to the inescapable conclusion that there was no boat there in the first place.

Ireland refers to the intensity of the light source as estimated by Maccabee, i.e. 260,000 candelas, which is comparable to the luminous intensity of a Japanese squid boat, provided that all of the bulbs strung around the deck are viewed as one big bulb. As Maccabee points out, the image on the film does not resolve individual bulbs. Also, the reported radar detection distances; the reported sighting directions to the light; portions of the film and portions of my tape, indicate the object moved a considerable distance from the time it was first detected until it was last seen. Unfortunately for the fishing boat theorists, the distance was too great and the time too short for a fishing boat to have been involved. There is also the point that boats with their lights on

are fishing … and when fishing, they do not move!

As mentioned in *Chapter 9: Documentary-Makers*, the initial report by the Royal New Zealand Air Force in January 1979 was condemned by the participants in both the 21 and 31 December sightings. This second report was also strongly criticised. For instance, Bill Frame and Ian Uffindell were not impressed by Ireland's assertion that they were looking at Jupiter. Let me quote from Ireland's report: "The lights appeared to move upwards and around in a rectangular pattern but at random speed. There appeared to be one large bright orange light and two less intense white lights. At one stage the lights appeared to rush forwards [towards the observers?] but generally they seemed to move northwards and eventually fade. The lights were observed for about 50 minutes at a bearing of about 60° true."

A casual reader of Ireland's report would not be aware that the bearing of the lights was actually closer to 100-130°, since they were described as moving left and right over the Wither Hills, as seen from Woodbourne. That would place Jupiter 50-70° to the left of the area where the two men were looking. This is what Frame had to say about Ireland's Jupiter theory. "I find that impossible to believe," he said in a letter to me in April 1981. "Jupiter, Venus, or any other planet would not be moving around the night sky in the various positions in which we saw the lights." Also, as Maccabee pointed out in a detailed criticism of Ireland's report, Jupiter is a *single* bright light, whereas Frame and Uffindell reported seeing one large bright light and two less intense lights. In addition, Jupiter does not usually move in a rectangular pattern over large distances.

Andy Herd was similarly unimpressed with Ireland's report and his conclusion that the radar targets were probably the result of "optical mirage effects" caused by abnormal atmospheric conditions. In a letter to me, dated 18 May 1981, Herd wrote:

"I have yet to hear any explanation that comes close to satisfying me as to the cause of the objects we observed for so long that night."

The flight crews were also concerned about the apparent government cover-up. Captain John Randle suggested to me that the efforts to denigrate the sightings and the witnesses were designed to cover experiments in holographic target decoys by the Australian and New Zealand navies. He said

every “but why?” was answered by this hypothesis and less proof had been used to hang people.

Captain Randle was keen not to attach too much significance to the sightings in which he was involved and argued that everything he saw and had reported to him could have been explained by helicopters. Although he referred to his sightings as a “very minor thing,” he was clearly impressed by the incidents involving Vern Powell, and later the sightings on 31 December.

“I do not believe for a moment that you were seeing Japanese boats on radar, or Venus, etc,” he told me.

“Nor do I quibble with what Vern Powell had either. The efforts to denigrate both these reports/reporters are ill founded, or stupid.

“I think it was holography or interferometry producing the whole affair and [I] can’t see little green men at the bottom of the plot.”

A similar theory was advanced soon after the sightings by a man who claimed he had worked for the top-secret Royal Air Force projects, “Hookdown” and “Sidescan.” He told a New Zealand newspaper that the objects seen and filmed off the Kaikoura coast might have been top-secret, remote controlled drones. The man theorised that the drones, used to decoy radar from an attacking strike force, were being tested by the United States military from the nearby secret US military installations at Mount John, and from a US Army tracking station near Christchurch. He suggested that the Americans were testing their advanced drones on civil aviation radar.

“Were it not for the fact that a film had been shot by an unsuspecting television crew,” he was quoted as saying, “they would be chuckling with glee at the confusion they were producing.”

I believe there are two main reasons for the New Zealand government preparing a second report on the sightings. First, it was obvious to most thinking people that the DSIR and the RNZAF rushed their first superficial report into print. Then Maccabee made the results of his investigation public. That left the New Zealand government, and its scientists in particular, with even more egg over their faces. It was too late to admit they were wrong so they set about plugging up their original leaky report and finally, after working on it for nearly a year, they came up with “*Unfamiliar Observations of Lights in the Night Sky.”*

To my knowledge, the New Zealand scientists still have not studied the entire UFO footage, nor have they spoken to all witnesses. Maybe when they finally get around to studying all the information, interviewing all the witnesses and analysing all the movie footage, their findings might be worthy of consideration. Until then I do not believe they have any right to expect their guesswork to be taken seriously.

The reports could of course be part of a deliberate government cover-up. That would certainly explain the selective reporting, the guesswork and the complete disregard for the facts, evident throughout both reports. If that is the case, and the government is aware of the true nature of the objects we saw and filmed that morning, then it is highly unlikely it will ever disclose that information.

Chapter 17: More Debunkers

In retrospect I can now see that I was extremely naïve when I first became involved in this UFO business. Initially it did not even enter my head that people would not believe the validity of the sightings. After all, I had seen the objects with my own eyes. So had the others on board the aircraft and, more important, they had been tracked on radar. I had the facts and they are the bread and butter of any journalist. So I was not prepared for the torrent of scepticism and cynicism that the story unleashed.

I had no idea that I would find it almost impossible to shake off the "UFO reporter" tag. I soon found that I had become an oddity, someone to seek out at parties and other social events. The curious, mostly genuine, wanted to know what had "really happened." Others, more cynical, did their best to tie me up in vague scientific equation and their own intellectual masturbation. Some even suggested, mainly behind my back, that maybe the channel had faked the whole thing in an attempt to boost their flagging news ratings. Then, of course, there were the true believers, mostly the extraterrestrial adherents. They sniffed me out (and still do, I might add) with glazed eyes. I was held in awe. I had almost touched the stuff of their dreams. So, for a time, I curtailed my social life and surrounded myself with a few trusted friends.

Gradually my interest in the subject began to undergo a metamorphosis. I was no longer concerned whether UFOs were space travellers, time travellers, psychic phenomena, God and his angelic hosts, or Satan and his demonic hordes. Rather, I had become fascinated by the lengths to which some people were prepared to go to argue away the facts surrounding the phenomenon.

I often though about the people who had been so quick to criticise and condemn when the story first broke and wondered why they had apparently not offered any challenge to Maccabee's findings. It seemed like a good idea to stir things up a little, so I wrote to those who had set themselves up as experts on the UFO phenomenon, and the 31 December sightings in

particular. I mentioned that I was writing a magazine article and that I was interested in their comments about the case more than a year later. I registered the letters to ensure they reached their destinations and gave the so-called experts two months to answer. “If I have not received a reply from you by that date,” I wrote, “I must assume that you have no wish to comment further on the case and I will make a note of that in my article.”

I did not write to the DSIR scientists because they had made known their views on the case. Also, I had publicly challenged Ireland’s findings several times in letters to New Zealand newspapers and magazines. Those letters elicited no response.

I wrote eight letters and received five replies within the two-month time limit I had set. I do not intend to make a detailed response to those letters, except when some clarification is necessary, since most of the points raised have been covered in earlier chapters.

The first to reply was the British Astronomer Royal, Sir Martin Ryle. On 3 January 1979, he was quoted as saying the film could have been a hoax and that he could have produced one like it within a week. Sir Martin had obviously neither read nor heard about Maccabee’s findings:

“When I was asked to comment on the UFO sightings on December 31, 1978, the main emphasis was placed on reports that it had been observed with a radar (I cannot now recall where); there are clearly various possibilities for misinterpreted visual observations. Since the radar was probably an Air Traffic Control system, it would have no facilities for height-finding, and since it apparently had not measured the speed of the object (which would have been easy), it is not possible to determine whether it was moving (a) very fast (b) at aircraft speeds (c) at bird flying speeds or (c) at wind speed. My enquirer also had no knowledge of the operating frequency of the radar. In view of the date of the event it seemed possible that some practical joker had dropped, from a light aircraft, a corner reflector + parachute, and of course possibly a light.

“I have not given the matter any further thought – but it seems that in the event of future observations, it would be of great importance to alert a radar as giving evidence for something detectable at these wavelengths and to establish any subsequent motion.”

Sir Martin refers to the date (the early morning of New Year's Eve) as somehow appropriate for a practical joke. Maybe they do things differently in Britain, but to my knowledge the traditional day for the practical joker has always been April the first.

The next reply came from Vince Ford, who works as a research officer for the Research School of Physical Sciences of the Australian National University. This body runs the Mount Stromlo Observatory outside Canberra, the Australian capital city, and the Siding Springs Observatory in the northwest of New South Wales. In the 16 January 1979 issue of the *Bulletin* magazine, under the headline "Why UFOs Are Just Pie In The Sky", Ford put himself forward as an open-minded but sceptical astronomer. The *Bulletin* article mentioned the claim by a small group of Mt Stromlo scientists that the published photographs from the New Zealand film were definitely planets magnified by "atmospheric shimmer." Ford talked of how "lens effects" and "image shimmer" gave a distant sphere an "oblate," or slightly squashed appearance as seen in the photos. He wrote:

"Many thanks for your letter of March 17, in which you ask for comment on your 'U.F.O.' sighting. A year later I remain as sceptical as ever. There is no doubt whatever as to the identity of your main object. It is a typical image of the planet Jupiter taken through a small (less than 6" lens). So much so that when first seeing it on the news, my two sons identified it! On the sequences shown on TV, even with the movement and de-focusing (excited cameraman or deliberate attempt at confusion, I won't speculate which) the cloud belts are obvious.

"You should be aware of the video analysis of a copy of your film made by Bob Lanigan-O'Keeffe, a member of the Illawarra Astronomical Society. If you are not (which I find incredible) then you should contact him now. His analysis provides confirmation of the Jupiter sighting, and indicates editing of the film, and I find it very peculiar that Channel 10 has never publicly acknowledged his findings. You would find his report gives you much food for thought. The methods he used are standard video analysis techniques, and he himself is a competent experimenter. I suspect Channel 10's silence was a result of receiving a copy of this report as it presents their actions in rather a poor light.

"Bruce Maccabee's comments on page (11) are illuminating, as it doesn't

sound like what the media reported; but some of my words of wisdom often get hopelessly garbled in the good old press too.

"Your fast-moving streaks with tails are typical meteor sightings. So, in summary, you have photographed Jupiter and observed meteors and have probably allowed a bit of panic to ruin a nice night flight. And why did Channel 10 NEVER ask an observatory to view their film and pass an opinion? The thought that springs to my mind is that all of us recognise Jupiter.

"I would be very interested in your comments in Lanigan-O'Keeffe's report and am happy to comment on things astronomical if you wish."

This is an example of a case where a person, who has not had access to all the information or the film, can still make categorical statements about what we saw and filmed. It is worth bearing in mind that the object Ford claimed was Jupiter was also Ireland's hypothetical fishing boat and was originally claimed by the DSIR to be Venus. Ford also hinted darkly at some sort of cover-up by the channel and a deliberate attempt at "confusion" by the cameraman. The reason the channel did not publicly acknowledge Lanigan-O'Keeffe's findings was really quite simple: they did not hold up to scientific scrutiny and they relied for their credence on the film being a hoax. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Ford's letter was his claim that we filmed meteors. In this, he echoed the public statement by Sir Bernard Lovell. Yet the fast-moving streaks were the result of camera movement, nothing more. I was so intrigued by Ford's comment that I wrote to him again seeking clarification. He replied:

"I mention them [meteors] because of your pilot's description in The Australian *of bright streaks crossing the flight path at high velocity. I am not sure of his exact wording as I didn't keep the paper, but at the time noted the similarity to a typical meteor sighting …"*

Ford then gave his own opinion about UFOs and it was quite obvious that he, like most people, equated UFOs with extraterrestrial travellers:

"There is no doubt that there are other intelligent beings in the universe. All of our current astronomy shows this to be an inevitable consequence of stellar evolution. However, the distances between stars are so great that for travel between them to be possible in any acceptable time-scale, you have to

break the physical laws which govern the universe (the very laws which make life inevitable), or you take a one-way ride to nowhere where your time-scale is OK for you but the universe dies out at a much faster rate and you have nowhere to go back to. In either case, the energy requirements are enormous and the economics prohibitive. So your space-traveller has to be pretty near immortal, have an infinite supply of energy and ready cash (or whatever its equivalent is), be sufficiently like us to share our queer itch to see what the rest of the universe is like, and then to be lucky enough to pick our sun as target rather than any of the millions of other possibles.

"So I consider a visit by space travellers unlikely to the point of being damn near impossible; I wish it were not so as such a visit would be the most exciting event in history. Unfortunately, all UFOs I've investigated in the last 15 years (other than those reports that leave out the vital information like times, bearings, heights and so on) have turned out to be very commonplace IFOs, 90 per cent of the time of astronomical origin. And your large object (Jupiter) is as easily identifiable by astronomers as Raquel Welch is by the average lecherous male. All rather sad."

I should point that neither I nor the others on board the aircraft that early morning saw anything that remotely resembled a "typical meteor sighting." As for Bill Startup's reported comments about " bright streaks crossing the flight path at high velocity," I can only say that all of the witnesses were misquoted by various newspapers and journals and I must assume that this is what happened in this case.

It was obvious from Ford's reply that he was at least interested in the subject, so I decided to pursue the matter with him. During a visit to the United States in July 1980, I mentioned Ford's interest to Bruce Maccabee and suggested that he write to him, which he did. It was a slightly chastened Ford who corresponded with me the following month:

"After correspondence received from Bruce Maccabee it appears that I may have to give much lower weight to Jupiter as a possible identification. He has provided a vital bit of data, not mentioned in any paper I'd read, of how a bright source could appear as a cloud-belted oblate spheroid. This gives two ways of obtaining Jupiter-like images, only one of which needs the camera to be aiming at Jupiter. So I concede that things are not always what they appear even to the trained eyeball, and in consequence, you have rocked my

faith in the visual attributes of Raquel.

"If Jupiter is ruled out I know of no other astronomical object which would fit the reports. As far as lighthouses, squid boats or mating mutton birds are concerned I wouldn't have the foggiest. And as to your comment that I confuse UFOs with extraterrestrial phenomena, fair comment, but if they are not then I'm not much interested in them. If you are absolutely sure that Jupiter can be dismissed (and you obviously are, and Maccabee appears pretty certain), then I'd say you have a real puzzle on your hands and wish you luck in untangling it."

I wrote once more to Ford offering him the chance to view a copy of the entire film and to study Maccabee's paper. He declined, saying he doubted that he could find anything in the film that Maccabee had missed and also pointing out that he was extremely busy.

I believe Ford's involvement in the New Zealand case shows the great danger of so-called authorities being asked to comment and then making categorical statements when they have only press reports and limited data on which to base their assumptions. At least Ford had the courage to admit he was wrong. Unfortunately his change of heart came about through correspondence with Maccabee and myself. Those people who read his statements in the *Bulletin* no doubt still believe that everything can be explained by planets magnified by "atmospheric shimmer."

The longest reply to my letter came from American Philip J. Klass, a confirmed sceptic, and the author of the book *UFOs Explained*. On 4 January 1979 he was reported in the news media as saying it was possible the film had been doctored. He put it in the hoax category. He wrote:

"Thank you for the opportunity to offer my views on your now famous 'UFO incident' during the night of Dec. 30/31, 1978. The following may be used in your proposed article, edited as required providing no serious injustice is done to my intended meaning.

"Let me preface my remarks by saying that I have seen Bruce Maccabee's copy of your film on two occasions, at least one of which involved a stop-action frame/frame projector to permit lengthy viewing in total.

"And let me add that after more than 13 years of investigating famous UFO incidents in the U.S., I am not surprised that you and your associates

(possibly excluding Capt. Startup) could get caught up in the excitement of the moment and honestly believe that you were photographing 'EFOs' (Extraordinary Flying Objects).

"The crew of a USAF RB-47 involved in a night-training mission in several southern states on the night of July 17, 1957, for example, got caught up in a similar situation based on visual and radar 'sightings' which seemingly were confirmed by a radar-like signal seemingly emitted by the UFO. (This case is analyzed in detail in Chapters 19 & 20 of my book, "UFOs Explained" *(Random House/Vintage). The incident has an earthly/prosaic explanation:*

"And as recounted at the end of Chapter 9, very experienced/senior USAF flight crews flying the B-29s on night bombing raids in the spring of 1945, reported that they were followed by an intense ball of fire that seemed to be a Japanese aircraft outfitted with an intense spotlight to illuminate the B-29s so Japanese fighters could attack them. Some crews even tried to shoot down the 'searchlight airplane,' which proved a bit difficult inasmuch as it was really a very bright planet Venus being viewed in very clear Pacific skies.

"Because you and your camera-crew associates were not then familiar with the vagaries of radar, and did not know that under certain atmospheric conditions that spurious targets (usually called 'angels') can appear on radar scopes, it is not surprising that you so readily concluded that if there were targets on the Wellington radar scopes, this indicated that unknown craft-like objects must be responsible.

"The problem with spurious returns, or angels, that has plagued radar since its earliest days, and still persists although recent vintage radars include new techniques to minimize the problem, is discussed in Chapter 18 of my book. The chapter concludes with one of 10 'UFOlogical Principles' drawn from my more than a decade of investigating seemingly mysterious UFO incidents. It is quoted below:

"'UFOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE 9: Whenever a light is sighted in the night skies that is believed to be a UFO and this is reported to a radar operator, who is asked to search his zone for an unknown target, almost invariably an 'unknown' target will be found. Conversely, if an unusual target is spotted on a radar-scope at night that is suspected of being a UFO, and an observer is dispatched or asked to search for a light in the night sky, almost invariably a

visual sighting will be made.'

"The book goes on to comment: 'In the excitement of the moment, it will seem unimportant that the radar target is to the west while the visual target may be east, north or south – the two 'sightings' will seem to confirm one another. Even if the sighting is made many minutes, or even hours, after or before the radar sighting, it will be assumed by some that the presence of the UFO has been positively confirmed by what is usually called 'two independent sensors.'

"Generally speaking, anomalous propagation conditions occur most frequently in the northern hemisphere during the warm/humid summer months, with July being the peak month here. Translated into the Southern Hemisphere, one can expect to be plagued most often by angels during January, and of course your own incident occurred less than two days before.

"That conditions were conducive to anomalous propagation at that time is evident by the tests conducted by your [New Zealand] Physics and Engineering Laboratory and described by Dr William Ireland in his report No. 659, dated December 1979.

"Ireland reports that on Jan. 2, 1979, 'an observer from the PEL Environmental Physics Division was stationed at the Wellington Airport Control Centre that night, and witnessed many of the anomalous returns seen on the radar screen after midnight.' Ireland himself was present at the Center on the night of Jan. 7 and states: ' Anomalous returns which the radar operator could not identify were present all the time, especially between about 1 am and 3 am, when there may have been a dozen present at a time. They all had the appearance of aircraft echoes when seen on the MTI (moving target indicator display), but they were generally absent when viewing 'raw video' i.e. with MTI turned off. The radar operator at Wellington was in radio contact with PEL observers on the Kaikoura Coast that night. On 18 different occasions he reported the positions of anomalous echoes or groups of echoes to the visual observers. In only two cases did they see anything near the specified bearings, in each case a ship,' Ireland's report states.

"One of the typical characteristics of most 'angels' is that they behave like 'ghosts.' That is, they appear briefly in one location, remain for a few scans

of the radar antenna, then suddenly disappear and a short time later another appears elsewhere. Sometimes they split into two or multiple targets; sometimes they grow bigger, or smaller.

"I should not expect that you, and your crew associates, would be aware of this shortcoming of radar; perhaps even Capt. Startup and his co-pilot were unaware of it. But I would expect that an experienced radar controller at Wellington should have been aware of these vagaries of radar.

"The incident involving the radar-blip on the aircraft's own radar during the return flight from Christchurch would appear to have a different explanation. If, as Maccabee tells me Startup now claims, he turned on his radar in an effort to try to spot 'UFOs,' then Startup needs to learn more about the nature and operation of such airborne radar, because he selected a 'ground-mapping' mode of operation rather than the 'weather' or air-search mode of operation, and tilted his antenna 3° downward, so that its beam illuminated the ocean surface rather than the airspace surrounding the aircraft. This, plus the fact that there was some overcast [clouds] in the vicinity of Christchurch, prompts me to suspect that Startup really activated his radar for use as a ground-mapping aid and not to search for UFOs.

"Regardless of his original intent, because Startup selected a ground-mapping mode and tilted the antenna downward, the aircraft radar would then 'see' ships of [sufficient size] on the ocean surface. During recent tests conducted by Startup, he reported that a group of 13 fishing vessels which he could see visually were clustered sufficiently close so as to generate a single strong echo on his radar at a range of approximately 28 miles, a significantly greater range than the 20 miles for the unknown target blip that showed up on the night of Dec. 30/31 on the return flight from Christchurch.

"The principal function of an air traffic controller is to maintain a safe and expeditious flight for aircraft under his/her control, which means trying to maintain safe separation. As a senior editor of Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine, I have spent many hours over the years in U.S. air traffic control centers and in the cockpit of U.S. military and civilian aircraft. During these times I have been present when 'conflicts' (potential mid-air collision situations) developed and have heard with my own ears the evidence of serious concern both in the center and in the cockpit. The concern is even greater when the 'conflict' involves a 'known' aircraft operating under the

authority of traffic control and an 'unknown' whose identity is unknown and with which the traffic controller is not in radio contact.

"When such conflicts develop, any traffic controller worthy of his name will try to contact the 'unknown' – using emergency frequencies – and will attempt to direct the controlled aircraft out of the conflict situation.

"In listening to a tape recording of the communication between the Wellington Center and Capt. Startup, and in studying the transcript, I fail to find or detect any evidence of concern or any evidence that Wellington attempted to direct Startup out of the seemingly potential conflict situation. Nor do I detect that Startup was at all concerned about the situation.

"One possible explanation for this is that the traffic controller was derelict in his responsibilities and that Startup has suicidal tendencies and has lost all desire to live. Another possible explanation is that the controller and Startup were 'playing games' for your benefit, never dreaming that the incident would mushroom into an internationally famous incident. I am unable to think of any other alternatives.

"In the early years of the UFO movement, UFO Promoters (UFOPs) were interested in reports of lights in the night sky ('nocturnal lights') that reportedly seemed to do mysterious maneuvers. But with increased experience most UFOPs have become disenchanted with 'nocturnal lights' because they so often turn out to have prosaic/earthly explanations.

"Dr J. Allen Hynek's Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) is probably the most respected UFOP organization in this country. Its full-time investigator, Allan Hendry, probably is the most experienced UFO investigator in this country if not in the world. The results of some 15-months of investigations of more that 1300 UFO reports is contained in his recently published book, The UFO Handbook. *Hendry found that 91 per cent of ALL UFO reports investigated during this period turned out to have prosaic explanations, i.e. to be IFOs (Identified Flying Objects), and that more than 88% of all UFO reports that turned out to be IFOs were of the 'nocturnal lights' variety. Even pro-UFO investigator Hendry found that 93% of all nocturnal light reports had prosaic explanations.*

"Henry acknowledges that 'luck' plays a key role in finding prosaic explanations, as my own 13+ years of investigations also indicates. Without

intensive investigation and a bit of good luck, a UFO report that is generated by prosaic causes may turn out to be forever unexplained.

"Proof of this can be found in your own experience with the Blenheim beacon, which at first seemed to be a 'UFO' but which you were later able to identify as an airport beacon solely because it was possible for Wellington Center to ask the airport to shut down the beacon. Without this bit of 'good luck,' an IFO would have remained a UFO.

"What were the other lights? Not being intimately familiar with the locale, its topography, the location of lighthouses, of air-navigation beacons, of cities, of Japanese squid fishing boats, of villages, etc. etc., I could not possibly even suggest an explanation for each and every light you saw and filmed. Perhaps some were bright celestial bodies. CUFOS / Hendry finds that approximately one out of every four UFO reports investigated turns out to have been a bright celestial body.

"At the risk of offending you, I must say that I am NOT impressed with your UFO incident and have encountered many more seemingly mysterious and inexplicable incidents – all of which turned out to have earthly/prosaic explanations.

"After having spent 13+ years here in investigating famous, seemingly inexplicable incidents, I have yet to find one that would prompt me to suspect that there are strange, extraterrestrial craft in our skies – or that any other equally exotic phenomena is involved.

"As evidence of my confidence, I enclose a copy of my $10,000 offer which is self-explanatory. I have executed the Agreement and invite your acceptance by signing both copies and returning one to me. I have repeatedly made this offer over U.S. radio/TV networks, in lectures and in the closing chapter of my book. Over the years perhaps a dozen persons have accepted the offer, but all but a few have reneged after a couple of years. Incidentally neither Hynek (of CUFOS), nor Maccabee, nor other leaders of U.S. UFO organizations have taken me up on my offer.

"Recalling an old American adage that 'Talk is cheap, put your money where your mouth is,' the foregoing may provide useful insights into the strength of the convictions of leading UFOPs."

Let me start with Klass's $10,000 offer. In it he agrees to pay the

aforementioned sum (within 30 days) after *any one* of the following events occurs: (A) A crashed spacecraft, or major piece of a spacecraft, is found whose design and construction clearly identify it as being of extraterrestrial origin in the opinion of the US National Academy of Sciences; or (B) The US National Academy of Sciences announces that it has examined any other evidence which conclusively proves that the Earth has been visited during the 20th Century by extraterrestrial spacecraft, in the opinion of the National Academy of Sciences; or (C) The first bona fide extraterrestrial visitor, who was born on a celestial body other than Earth, appears live before the General Assembly of the United Nations, or on a national television program. Anyone signing Klass's agreement, then agrees to pay Klass $100 a year until the occurrence of any of the events, A, B and C; and if none of these events has occurred within a 10 year period, then the signatory to the agreement is relieved of making any further payments. The only comment I can make on his offer is that I have at no time claimed that what we saw and filmed was extraterrestrial and, to my knowledge, neither has anyone else associated with the case. Our case simply offers proof of a phenomenon which to date remains outside the bounds of man's knowledge.

Klass suggests that the radar targets were "angels," the result of anomalous propagation, and he refers to the tests carried out by Ireland. Maccabee, however, states that during the sightings the technician on duty in the Wellington radar room checked for signs of anomalous propagation but found no evidence of the super-refraction referred to by Ireland. It is also worth bearing in mind that the DSIR tests were made on 2 and 7 January, whereas our sightings were on the morning of 31 December. The fact that Ireland says he found evidence of anomalous propagation on those two dates does not mean it was present on 31 December.

Klass, like so many of the critics of the New Zealand sightings, then attempts to belittle the significance of the case by attacking the integrity of some of the principal participants, in this case Geoff Causer and Bill Startup. This, I have discovered, is part of the not-so-subtle art of debunking. No amount of mud-slinging by Klass, or by anyone else for that matter, will alter the fact that Startup is a well-respected pilot with more than 20 years' flying experience, and that Causer is a highly trained government radar operator. Klass mentions the "seemingly potential conflict situation" that arose and the fact

that neither Causer nor Startup appeared to be at all concerned. That is not entirely correct. Startup twice put the aircraft into a 360 degree turn in a vain effort to see what was on his tail and, in an interview with me a few hours after we landed, he admitted that he had been a "little apprehensive." It is also worth bearing in mind that out of the 28 separate incidents involving the Wellington radar there were only two occasions when radar targets were reported directly in front, and close to, the aircraft (i.e. two miles and three miles). The transcript of the conversation between Causer and Startup does not reveal any action by Causer to direct the plane away from the targets. I cannot answer for Causer's actions that morning but I am sure that as an experienced government radar operator he would not have done anything to deliberately endanger the lives of those on board the Argosy. Obviously he did not feel there was a "conflict situation," for reasons best known to himself.

I do not believe there is any substance in Klass's claim that Causer and Startup were "playing games" for my benefit. To start with, Causer was not aware of our presence (the television crew) until Startup informed him soon after the initial sightings. And there is nothing in the transcript of the conversation between the two men to suggest any such game-playing. Also, I do not believe that Startup has "suicidal tendencies." He struck me as a very responsible man and I would not have got back on board the aircraft for the return flight to Blenheim unless I had confidence in him as a person and as a pilot.

Klass also refers to Allan Hendry of CUFOS and describes him as probably the most experienced UFO investigator in the United States, if not in the world. He mentions that during a 15-months study, Hendry found that 93 per cent of all nocturnal lights reports had prosaic explanations. This, of course, is another classic debunker's ploy – guilt by association. By mentioning the fact that so many nocturnal lights cases do have conventional explanations, Klass is hoping to lessen the credibility of the 31 December sightings. He cleverly uses Hendry's obvious standing as a UFO researcher to add weight to his argument that most UFO cases, especially nocturnal lights, are eventually identified. What he does not mention is that Hendry, an acknowledged expert in his field, agrees with Maccabee's conclusion that the New Zealand sightings remain unidentified.

Klass also talks about “luck” playing a role in finding prosaic explanations and he claims that I identified a light on the return leg of the journey as the airport beacon at Blenheim. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, I do not believe anyone has yet invented a beacon capable of suddenly appearing in the sky, falling at an incredible speed, and then settling into a rolling and turning pattern.

Lanigan-O’Keeffe, the Jupiter and hoax film proponent, also wrote a reasonably lengthy reply:

“I have spent much time considering your letter, your registered letter of March 17, where you demand a reply for publication in an un-named widely circulated magazine, making the threat that if I do not respond in the manner you want, then you will notify the readers of the un-named widely circulated magazine that I have no wish to comment further on the case. With this letter you imply that I am a sceptic and a critic, and this only shows how wrong and deluded you are. If you had taken up my invitation to speak at the ninth National Convention of Amateur Astronomers in Geelong, just 75km away from Melbourne, then you would have had the opportunity of receiving some scientific ratification. Of the 100 present, there were representatives of the Anglo Australian Telescope, Mt Stromlo Observatory, Melbourne Planetarium, UFOIC, and all the major astronomical bodies in Australia. The last paper of the convention was on the topic of UFO research and the Amateur Astronomer. I mention this because the paper showed how wrong and deluded many UFO researchers are, attacking the credibility of Dr J. Allen Hynek (many times), Dr Maccabee, NICAP, GSW (Ground Saucer Watch), Bemister (O/10 network), Dr G. King and all the UFO magazines, to the purpose of encouraging research and education into the many and diversified types of phenomena and modes of research which must be carried out when considering any UFO story. Yours was not the only story considered, in fact it was treated with the same respect as all the other sightings.*

“I am a researcher, and as a researcher I must be ‘The Devil’s Advocate’; asking the dirtiest most searching questions to the very limits of the resolution of the research techniques, and I made this very clear in my paper at the convention, showing those present how to research a film or a UFO story that was published in a magazine. I further illustrated my presentation

and my attacks on other researchers with cold scientific logic, showing how they are guilty of verifying something that they are not allowed to verify, as science demands proof, and each proof only confirms the basic hypothesis. I confirmed a theory when I initially examined the original UFO story, however science demands testing, and it was this testing that confirmed the fact that the object seen was the planet Jupiter, but the phenomena cause was defeated, and this is where you again faulter [sic]. I have not stuck to the phenomena cause (which may have been correct, or the hypnotic suggestive theory) as that footage shows too many man-made artificial effects that should not have been found. Basic optical phenomena which should be found are not and basic optical phenomena which should never be found are. In eight areas where a positive answer to a question would discredit the sighting film, the footage is positive.

"I did not intend to research this footage until your friend Mr Lee intimidated me on Jan 29th; then there were those two telephone calls which you made, that disgusting foul mouthed attack on my credibility (April 27th 7.00 pm 1979) where you called me a F..KWIT and an Ar..hole and wished to see me dead, followed by that other conversation on May 3rd where you demanded to know who my publisher was so that you could make money in a law court by claiming that I had liabled [sic] you. I have never called you a faker, a hoaxer, or guilty of fraud, which in a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald *you said I have done. I have until this moment been rather courteous, and although your actions have scientifically created a lot of friction, I was tricked into two interviews with you; one on the demand that I accuse you of something which I cannot prove? I can prove that the film is not a genuine account but I do not know who made it, for you may be the innocent bystander caught up in someone else's fun-times. It was your dramatic sensationalism (on a par with 'Truth'**) that made me make obvious predictions. Your main error was logic and using non-scientific irrational arguments. As for that letter of November First 1979, and my reply on the 7th, I had no inclination of talking to the convention on that subject of UFOs as I did not want to prostitute myself or my research as I had a more important paper to present. Along comes your first letter and you gave me the inspiration of talking publically [sic]. I gave you every opportunity of presenting a paper by supplying the correct registration form, and even told*

you when and where to submit the paper. Immediately before the convention, I received this registered letter, and have now returned the compliment. Sir, I can only thank you personally for giving me the driving spirit to research this taboo subject, and to push me into publically [sic] speaking with the correct scientific attitude. It was you who showed me how to research a UFO story and how to write my thoughts scientifically, as you showed me a few home truths that I had forgotten. If I ever write a book on the subject of UFO research, a book which is much needed scientifically, then I would like to publically [sic] thank you for giving me the incentive to view a different part of astronomy."

I refer the reader to my earlier comments on Lanigan-O'Keeffe and his theories, and to further correspondence that is reproduced in full in Appendix B.

A Christchurch ornithologist proffered the theory early in January 1979 that the light sources could have been up to half a million mutton birds (Hutton's shearwaters) flying inland to mate. Geoff Harrow said the birds, which have shiny underparts, could have been reflecting light from the Japanese squid fleet off the Kaikoura coast. Apparently he had been told by radar operators at Christchurch airport that it was quite possible the mutton birds were the objects on the radar screen. In reply to my letter, he wrote:

"Thank you for your circular dated 17 March asking for current comment about the UFO sightings at night near the mouth of the Clarence River 31 December 1978. I have no reason for changing my comment from that made at the time.

"I offered my comment as a possible explanation for the sightings which still appear to require a satisfactory explanation.

"The following facts should be kept in mind when considering an explanation of UFO sightings in the Kaikoura area.

"1. Upwards of 500,000 Hutton's shearwaters are flying at night from the sea up to five and six thousand feet above sea level to their breeding burrows high in the Seaward Kaikoura Ranges.

"2. The times of UFO sightings correspond with the times of greatest flight activity of Hutton's shearwaters.

"3. The average weight of a Hutton's shearwater is over 300 grams and even

a small flock of say 5000 birds at two to five thousand feet above sea level, show clearly on radar screens at Wellington airport if the birds were flying above the Clarence River mouth, which they do every summer night.

"4. Hutton's shearwaters have pure white underparts, which may reflect moonlight sufficient to be visible to an observer.

"I enclose a copy of a paper on Hutton's shearwaters published a few years ago in the journal 'Notornis' *and you will note the summer nocturnal flight movements recorded for this species.*

"In closing I would like to say that I am prepared to accept that some unexplained phenomena were seen by the crew of the Argosy, and that there will be a reason for these sightings if enough research is done on this problem. I wish you well in your research and hope that the above facts may be helpful."

Perhaps Mr Harrow was not aware that one of the lights we filmed had a luminous intensity of 250,000-300,000 candelas. I realise the birds were heading inland to mate, but I doubt if they were generating that much heat! Also, Harrow claimed originally that the birds were reflecting light from the squid fleet (which, incidentally, was 260 kilometres off the coast). Now he says it was moonlight. I cannot quite work out how birds flying at up to 6000 feet are able to reflect moonlight off their bellies so that it would be visible to observers on a plane high above (the plane cruised at between 13,000 and 14,000 on both legs of the journey). Maybe they were so excited by the prospect of some hanky-panky that they were flying upside down.

It is a great pity that I did not receive replies from the noted British radio astronomer, Sir Bernard Lovell, and Mr David Mabin, the head of New Zealand's Mount John Observatory. Sir Bernard was quoted as saying that our UFOs were nothing more than meteors that failed to burn up on entering the atmosphere; Mabin, on the other hand, said initially that he was 99 per cent sure we had filmed Venus and then, after seeing the news item, said we had most probably filmed Jupiter under very poor viewing conditions.

So, there you have it, folks. The experts have spoken. Unfortunately for the anti-UFO lobby, the theories differ, sometimes quite markedly. The critics of the 31 December sightings have also forgotten one important point. Nearly all of the lights we saw that morning started as pinpoints and then pulsated

into huge, hypnotic balls of fire. I somehow doubt that that city lights, beacons, cabbage patches, squid boats, mutton birds and planets exhibit these identical qualities.

Those soulless realists who were not there will never know the unbelievable beauty of that light show. I can flick a mental switch and be back there in an instant, sweat trickling down my back, the noise of the engines suffocating me, the light show outside the window fusing my brain. And that, my scientific and sceptical friends, is a fact. Like it, or not!

FOOTNOTES:

*A television reporter who did a number of stories on UFOs.

**An Australian weekly newspaper.

Chapter 18: A Klassical Encounter

During July 1980, I travelled to the United States on a private trip and spent some time at the home of Dr Bruce Maccabee in Maryland. While I was there I agreed to a meeting with Philip Klass and Robert Sheaffer. Both men are well known in the US for their anti-UFO stance and Klass would probably not be too displeased to be described as the world's leading UFO debunker. In an excellent article in the February 1981 issue of *Fate* magazine, titled "Phil Klass vs. the UFO Promoters", writer Jerome Clark describes Klass as "a man who has made it his mission in life to demolish the UFO phenomenon." Although Klass's right to pursue his own particular stand is not denied, his methods are seriously questioned. As I discovered during my four-hour meeting with the two debunkers, Klass has no truck with those who do not agree with his assumptions. Perhaps this attitude is best summed up by Jerome Clark in his *Fate* article: "There is no way of winning an argument with him because, even when presented with documented evidence of the incorrectness of his position, Klass seldom concedes he is wrong. Instead he holds fiercely to a position even when it is demonstrably at variance with the facts."

Philip Klass

KEY: Philip Klass, K; Robert Sheaffer, S; Bruce Maccabee, M: and Quentin Fogarty, F. I have tried to make the transcripts as accurate as possible, but there were times when the raised voices on both sides of the room tended to drown out what was being recorded on tape.

There they sat, the master and the apprentice; the super sceptics, the debunkers of the "new nonsense." On my right, Philip Klass – confessed sceptic and elder statement of all things rational. On my left, Robert Sheaffer – science writer, lecturer, sceptical UFO investigator – angling for the master's crown, attentive, watching and listening. On the other side of the room, myself – hoping for a fruitful discussion – and Dr Bruce Maccabee, expecting fireworks. He was not to be disappointed. I had agreed to the meeting, keen to have an intelligent and reasoned approach from Klass and Sheaffer. What I did not know at the time was that to a super sceptic, particularly someone like Klass, there is no such thing as an intelligent and reasoned approach. There is only scorn, innuendo, sarcasm and character assassination.

The meeting began innocently enough. Klass was interested in establishing my background as a journalist and the reaction of other television stations in Australia to the original news story. He also wanted to know who held the rights to the UFO footage and whether I had received any money from the sale of the film to other television networks. I stated that the channel held the copyright and that I had not received any payment. The conversation then moved on to the sightings themselves and the events leading up to them.

K: Let's do a flashback now. Tell us how this thing was originally set up. You are originally from New Zealand we understand?

I related the events as they had happened, the fact that I was on holidays, the call from the channel, the hiring of David and Ngaire Crockett, the interview with John Cordy and Vern Powell and the agreement by Safe Air to take us on board their 31 December flight to Christchurch. Klass seemed particularly intrigued about my motives for trying to get on board the Argosy. I did my best to explain the visual nature of television and the need for extra footage to "dress up" the interviews and provide material for voice-over information.

As the meeting progressed, there was a subtle change in Klass's attitude and voice inflection. It gradually became obvious that he was not really interested

in my side of the story. All he wanted was confirmation of his own *interpretation* of the events. I was made to feel that I, and everyone else on board the Argosy that morning, was on trial.

K: I was curious why you didn't begin filming the unusual lights as soon as Startup called them to your attention. Apparently it was six or eight minutes before you decided to film them.

I explained that we were filming in the cargo hold and that I had just finished the first take of a piece-to-camera when Startup indicated we should get up on the flight deck.

F: Now you have to understand that we were there to do a news story. We weren't there to film what happened later on. And, if the cameraman wants to do another take, and you're the reporter, then you do as the cameraman says, because if he's not happy with the sound …

K: He has the chance to photograph UFOs and he can make this shot in the belly [cargo hold] tomorrow, the next day …

F: No, no, no. You don't understand. We didn't know what was upstairs at this stage …

K: The pilot has told you there are some unusual lights …

F: No. Not at all. He came down [actually he put his head down] and said would you guys get up here when you're finished …

K: He didn't say why …
F: He didn't say why at all …
K: And you didn't ask him, you didn't say are you serving tea up there or …
F: Don't be silly …
K: No, I mean it …

F: You are being silly. Can you understand [what it's like] to be in a freight aircraft with the noise. I'm standing down there, the microphone attached to the tape-recorder, which is across the other side of the aircraft. I'm there specifically to do this story. The pilot puts his head down. I think he put his head down. He stood just back from it [the stairwell] and said, 'can you guys get up here as soon as you can." I said to David, 'right, are you ready,' and he said …

K: And that didn't prompt you to say why, one word – why?
F: It's easy to ask these questions now, so much later, but …

K: You mean maybe the aeroplane was about to explode or crash … but it never occurred to you … as I say, I'm only a technical news journalist for the hard print and I don't understand how TV newsmen's minds work. But, so, he did say get up here as soon as you can, you did not ask why, you continued then …

F: I don't think you should read anything into the fact that I didn't ask why …

K: No, but it's a matter of fact that you did not ask why …

F: Yes, it's a matter of fact, but get the whole thing into perspective again … why we were there, the noise in the aircraft, the fact that …

K: But you did hear him say get up here as soon as you can …

F: It's not easy to get up those stairs in a hurry and get back down again when you've got a microphone … I called out to the cameraman, I said, 'right are we finished, David, are you happy?' He said 'I'd like to do another take." It only takes about 30 seconds to do another take as such, so why not do another take. This is our last chance to do it …

K: Davy Crockett is your boss …

F: I'm in charge, but if he's not happy … he's the guy behind the camera, his wife is the person with the headphones. You know, these circumstances are rather unusual, filming on board an aircraft with all that noise anyway, so we were concerned about the noise drowning out my voice. So I assumed that the main reason [for wanting to do another take] was that they couldn't hear my voice. So, they say 'do it again,' I do it again.

Sheaffer, who kept a fairly low profile throughout the evening, then wanted to know whether I had seen the lights over Kaikoura as soon as I reached the flight deck. I said that after 18 months I could not remember exactly what had happened but I assumed that the crew probably had pointed them out to me.

K: And you trust their judgment that they were unusual lights?

F: There wasn't any mention of unusual lights. They pointed out some lights in the direction of Kaikoura, we could see the lights of Kaikoura …

K: Did they say, 'there's the city of Kaikoura?' I mean why were they

pointing them out, sightseeing or unusual lights …

F: Why would anyone be sightseeing at that time of the morning?

K: I don't know, I'm asking you. I don't know the answer, [if I did] I wouldn't ask you Quentin.

F: But that's a silly question to say [unintelligible] sightseeing at 12 o'clock in the morning. Who would be sightseeing …

K: Okay, I ask a lot of silly questions, so I hope you'll forgive me …

F: Well, I'll give you silly answers …

K: No, you characterise them as silly, but …

F: Well, it's a silly question to assume that we were sightseeing …

K: All right, so the pilot said, 'look those are unusual lights' …

F: I can't remember his exact words. He pointed out some lights in the direction of Kaikoura that were much brighter than the lights of Kaikoura.

Klass then got back to the delay before Crockett began filming on the downward leg. Maccabee explained that in the circumstances the delay was not unreasonable. To start with there was the second take of my piece-to-camera, Crockett then had to take his camera off the tripod, change film magazines, negotiate the stairs to the flight deck, take his seat, and also become oriented with his surroundings and the night sky. Maccabee, Klass and Sheaffer then discussed, at some length, the film shot on the downward leg and the possibility that some of the lights above Kaikoura, as well as the lights of the town itself, were filmed. Maccabee said that it might be possible to confirm the images on the film with the help of sophisticated and expansive image enhancement.

A short time later Klass was back on to one of his pet side-issues in the New Zealand case – the alleged incompetence of the flight crew.

K: You flew with Startup and Guard. Does Startup have much faith in Guard's ability as a pilot?

F: I don't know. You would have to ask him that.

K: Did you see any evidence of a reluctance to let Guard fly the aeroplane?

F: I wouldn't even be aware of that. I don't know what goes on between pilots and co-pilots.

The conversation was becoming rather animated by this stage and Maccabee joined in to point out that it was standard policy for the pilot to fly the aircraft on one leg of the journey and the co-pilot on the other. Klass wanted to know why Startup had not handed over control of the aircraft to Guard when the plane turned towards the object soon after takeoff from Christchurch. (After the turn, Startup, who was in the left-hand seat, could see only the glow of the object in the right window and not the object itself. Guard, who was in the right-hand seat, had a clear view of the object).

K: But when the pilot makes the command decision to try to, I'll say to chase after this visual UFO off Christchurch, which he himself cannot see, which the co-pilot is in the much preferred position to be able to see, Startup does not turn the control, he does not say to Guard 'hey you take over, you can see this baby, you fly towards it.'

F: I don't know. You can always write to him and ask him.

M: He didn't say to Bob, so far as I know, he didn't say to Bob, 'here, you take over.' What Startup says that he did was, they got to a cruising altitude, [he] made some comment to Bob Guard like 'let's have a look-see,' or something to that effect. He then called the Christchurch people and told them he was going to make a slight course correction and went into a turn, without really having planned how far he was going to turn.

Maccabee and Klass continued to argue about Startup's actions during this part of the flight. Maccabee said Startup knew the object was to the right and at a lower angle, but he did not know exactly where it was.

K: But Guard has just reported, the pilot has heard Guard say it's at three o'clock. Clearly Guard has a good view of the visual UFO. Why in the world is Startup so stubborn, or so dumb? That's why you carry a co-pilot and the co-pilot has the optimum view.

F: Again, I can suggest, why don't you write to Bill Startup and ask him.

M: Anything that I say, or he [F] says is going to be putting words into Startup's mouth.

K: Is there any suspicion in your mind that what you saw might have been some secret weapon of the New Zealand government, of the Australian government?

F: You really have to know the New Zealand government. If you knew the New Zealand government you wouldn't ask that question. They can't even afford to fly their Air Force jets because they haven't got enough fuel. If that [the sightings] was a secret military manoeuvre by the New Zealand Air Force, then I'll fly to the moon.

K: What hypotheses do you lean to, do you think they were American secret weapons, or Russian …

F: I've never even thought for a moment they were secret weapons.
K: What do you think it was that you saw?
F: Bright lights in the sky …
K: Coming from what source?

F: I have no idea. If I could answer that question I would probably be worth about 64 million dollars.

K: Well, we've ruled out some things. You don't think it was an El Al Israel airlines on an unscheduled flight …

F: [In despair]: It might have been …
K: You don't think it was New Zealand Air?

F: It's probably hard … because you're not as aware of the New Zealand situation as probably I am. But you have to bear in mind that all this is taking place over an almost entirely deserted, as far as population goes, area of New Zealand, in the dead of the night. There were no commercial flights.

K: So we can rule out prosaic, in your opinion, conventional explanations?

F: On the basis of Dr Maccabee's investigation, and on the basis of what we saw and what radar saw and everything, yes.

Klass was now in full flight. There was no holding him back. I was about to get what *Fate's* Jerome Clark describes as the "Full Treatment."

K: Well they must have been spaceships from other worlds?

F: No. Who said they had to be spaceships …

K: Well, can you offer any; give me two or three other possible …
F: I can't give you, I don't know what they were …
K: You've had 18 months to think about it. Surely you …
F: Why does UFO have to be extraterrestrial?

K: It doesn't, so I'm asking you, I'm asking you. Surely this has had a big impact on your life …

F: Of course it has, yes …
K: Then surely you must have …
F: I've thought about it, yes …
K: Could it be the New Zealand Air Force, [it] probably isn't the Russians, spaceships …
F: This is your opinion? Or is it mine?
K: No, I'm trying to get you …

M: Don't lead the witness. [This was in reference to correspondence between Klass and Maccabee in which Klass claimed that Maccabee had asked leading questions of witnesses during his investigation into the New Zealand case.]

K: Okay, could you give me two or three possible explanations for the lights that you think …

F: I can only give you one. They were bright lights in the sky which, on the basis of Dr Maccabee's investigation and what we saw, can't be explained in conventional terms.

Sheaffer intervened before this particular exchange could go any further. In fact, there were a number of times during the evening when it became obvious that Sheaffer was embarrassed by Klass's overbearing, holier-than-thou attitude. When this happened, he would interrupt in an attempt to take the heat out of the air. On this occasion, he shifted the conversation back to the first part of the journey out of Christchurch. He also suggested that we might have mistaken the Japanese fishing fleet, which at the time was about 260 kilometres away, for our UFO. But Klass was soon back into the fray.

K: So you're heading out essentially into an area with an absence, a general absence of lights. You are looking for bright lights because you think they may be UFOs …

F: I'm not looking for bright lights …
K: You're not looking for bright lights?
F: I'm in the back of the aircraft …
K: When you get up to the front …

F: I'm not looking for bright lights, I see a bright light. I didn't go up there [the flight deck] with the intention of looking for bright lights …

K: I thought you said you cancelled your plans to stay …
F: We didn't know there were going to be more bright lights in the sky. We were told there were radar targets in the area. No one gave us a little bit of ESP to say there were bright lights in the area …

K: But somebody said, after takeoff from Christchurch, someone said, 'come up here, there are bright lights' …

F: No, no, no, no …
K: You just wandered up …

F: No, stop. I already told you we were in the back strapped in. When the seatbelt light went off we went up on the flight deck.

K: And then what happened?
F: I saw two bright lights.
And on, and on, it went.

There was one question I had to ask Klass in view of his comment to me in a letter that he was not impressed by the New Zealand case. I knew that he had been corresponding with Maccabee for several months and the sheer volume of this correspondence suggested that he had a great interest in this "non-impressive" case. Why?

K: Because it has assumed such great importance in Bruce Maccabee's mind, in Hynek's [mind], and the UFO movement here. As I say, if I were asked to select an impressive UFO case this would not be the one that I would select. But Bruce and others have selected it and, like Mount Everest, it is there. So Bruce will raise it, Bruce discussed it, Bruce and others have press conferences, you're on Good Morning America, and so on. So, perforce I must spend some time on it. Let me assure you that I would rather be out on my sailboat.

A little later in the evening, Klass again mentioned this desire to be elsewhere, rather than "wasting his time" on the New Zealand case. We were discussing Maccabee's involvement and Klass mentioned that Channel O should have hired a "real" investigator (a sceptic like himself), rather than a UFO "proponent" (like Maccabee). I pointed out that on the basis of his

reasoning, that is, that a pro-UFO investigator must come up with a pro-UFO report, then an anti-UFO investigator must come up with an anti-UFO report. He thought about that for a moment and replied that he had really meant that the channel should have hired both a sceptic and a proponent. He then stated that soon after the sightings he had been approached by the American Broadcasting Company to go to New Zealand to investigate the sightings for them. Naturally Maccabee and I were keen to know why he had not taken up the ABC's kind offer. He told us he had made plans to go skiing and he did not think the case was important enough to interrupt his vacation.

I was also anxious to establish just how sceptical both Klass and Sheaffer were and I asked them whether they would be prepared to admit they were wrong if they finally concluded that the New Zealand case could not be explained in conventional terms.

K: Well, let me put it to you on this basis. For 28 years I have worked for the Western world's leading aerospace publication [*Aviation Week and Space Technology*], [it] has carried more articles on legitimate space travel than any single publication in the whole Western world. If I ever find a case, an incident, that suggests to me even a one per cent possibility that this earth is being visited by extraterrestrials …

F: You're hooked into the extraterrestrial syndrome. Why do UFOs have to be extraterrestrial?

K: They could be ghosts, they could be leprechauns, they could be …

F: No, no, no. I said they don't have to be extraterrestrial …

K: My current theory, as I explained to Bruce, is that what you saw was Santa Claus and his reindeer …

F: But that is so stupid, such a stupid thing to say …

K: I've asked you for your hypotheses, you have refused or declined as if extraterrestrial craft is a dirty, vulgar word …

F: Not at all. What I'm saying is that you seem to be locked into the extraterrestrial theory thing. It does not have to be …

K: Well, can you give me three other hypotheses to consider and I will entertain them, I assure you. Give me three!

F: As I said, I do not know what it was …

K: No, give me three hypotheses …

F: All right, maybe it was Santa Claus and his sleigh, maybe it was, umm …

K: A ghost?

F: Yeah, that is one more you have given me. You are better at coming up with idiotic statements, so you make another suggestion …

K: Then you give me your three most likely hypotheses.

F: The most likely hypothesis is that it was a bright light, secondly that it was an unexplained bright light and, on the basis of what Dr Maccabee has found, it remains unexplained and cannot be explained in conventional terms. That does not mean it is Santa Claus and his sleigh, it does not mean it's a ghost, it does not mean it is a leprechaun, it does not mean it is an extraterrestrial spacecraft. How can you say that, it doesn't make sense?

K: Well, I would agree with you, Quentin, but I'm simply asking you. You've had 18 months. This has certainly been an important incident in your life, I would think one of the more important … I won't say the most … and certainly you've had time, you're an introspective man who pauses and thinks, and surely …

F: And stupid [reference to a letter to M in which K described F as stupid] …

S: I don't think that proves very much, because it's entirely plausible for someone …

K: He asked me a question …

S: (continuing): For someone to say I saw something that I don't [unintelligible] …

F: If one day you were presented with enough evidence that you couldn't …

S: Would you change your mind …

F: Would you change your mind, or is it to a stage where you cannot change your mind? That is my question.

S: I can answer for myself. When people ask me that, and people do ask me that, I say I'm ready at any time to change my mind if something comes along …

F: That's fine. I just wonder if Philip feels the same way or whether you're so

locked into being sceptical …

K: Well, if you were to suggest, which you have not, that it was a leprechaun, I think I would …

F: That's being silly again …

K: If you were to suggest [unintelligible] it was Santa Claus, I would have trouble …

F: My question was, if somebody could present enough evidence [to prove] that a light source, like in this particular case, remains outside a conventional explanation, behaved in a way that we cannot duplicate …

K: As a matter of fact it does not, you see …

F: I'm saying if somebody could do that, would you be prepared to change your mind?

K: Absolutely.

The latter part of the evening was taken up with a screening of the UFO film and I took a back seat as Klass and Sheaffer questioned Maccabee about various sections and individual frames, although Klass and I continued to snipe away at each other. Gradually I became more and more angry. I had hoped for a reasoned and intelligent discussion; instead, I was being treated like a guilty child. Finally, just after midnight, I reached boiling point. Sheaffer was trying to edge Klass towards the door. It had been a long and tiring night and Sheaffer was anxious to get home. I decided I could not let the opportunity pass. I had suffered a lot at the hands of the so-called experts and I had no intention of letting Klass slip through my fingers unscathed. I berated him for his public statements in the first few days after the sightings when he was quoted as saying the film may have shown Venus, or could have been a hoax. I pointed out, in strong, colourful language, that he and others had caused the witnesses and their families great distress with their unfounded comments.

Needless to say, when Sheaffer did manage to steer a slightly red-faced and angry Klass to the door, there were no handshakes. The hanging judge of ufology stepped out into the warm, muggy, early morning air, probably wondering out loud at this little whippersnapper from Down Under who had dared to stand up to him.

Chapter 19: Reflections 1982

Where does the story go from here? As John Acuff pointed out at the New York press conference, the most frustrating thing about the field of UFO research is that unless you are willing to speculate, you end up with a negative conclusion. The "third order" analysis that Bruce Maccabee spoke about at the press conference might change all that but, at the time of writing, that final investigation had still to get under way. The main stumbling blocks were the cost, estimated at between $100,000 and $150,000, and the reluctance on the part of the channel to pursue the story.

Soon after my arrival back from New York in March 1979, I was told by a senior executive that, in his opinion, the story had been taken far enough. He said the channel had made nothing out of it; in fact it had cost them money. In some ways I can understand that initial reluctance on the part of the channel's executives to give the story their full support. To start with, they would be reluctant to criticise Sir Reginald Ansett who then headed the company that controlled the channel. Sir Reginald was reported to have told a meeting of senior staff soon after the sightings that we had filmed Venus and his *pilots did not see "these sorts of things." Also, while we were in New York, Eddie Dean told Lee and myself that the people back at the channel thought we were all mad. That comment, which I hope was made in jest, perhaps best sums up the feelings, not only of the channel's management at the time, but of a large section of the general public. I know also that in those early days the channel took fright at the amount of criticism the story was generating and they decided not to pursue it for a while. There was a slight thaw, which allowed the press conference to be held, but there was never again any real enthusiasm for the story. The issue was further complicated by the fact that nearly all of those initially involved with the incident parted company with the channel soon after.

This apparent lack of interest, and the reluctance of the channel to follow up an earlier promise to produce its own major documentary on the sightings,

was confirmed by an article that appeared in a Melbourne Sunday newspaper on 2 December 1979. The report stated that Leonard Lee, who was no longer employed by the channel, had been granted exclusive rights to the UFO footage in order to make a four-part documentary. According to the article, the channel had received offers totaling $4 million for the film and Lee and his "financial backers" intended to complete the documentary at a total cost of about $200,000. The implied profit of $3,800,000 was to go to Lee and his benefactors. I greeted the article with some scepticism because I could not believe that any television channel would allow almost $4 million to slip through its fingers. The program was promised early in 1980, but there was still no sign of it by the end of 1981.

Lee admitted to me in a phone conversation that he was having difficulty in raising the necessary finance and that the newspaper article was initiated by him in an attempt to "attract" some investment. I know that Lee approached many people, both in Australia and overseas, to try to get his documentary off the ground but he was unable to generate sufficient interest, or finance.

So where does this leave the story? Maccabee and others are continuing their investigation although they are hampered by limited resources and funds. Maccabee, however, remains firmly convinced that the light sources we saw and filmed that morning cannot be identified by conventional means. He believes there are several things, especially my taped commentary and the Wellington radar tape, which set the case apart from other UFO sightings. He says:

"The tapes mean that you don't have to rely on the memory of people as to what went on. You have a blow by blow account as it were. This makes the case unique as far as I'm concerned. I don't know of any other case that is quite like that."

Of the film, Maccabee says:

"There are lots of films and still photos that are supposedly of UFOs, but the icing on the cake in this case is that a film was taken at the same time that an object was on radar and five people were looking at it.

"This combination of evidence means that you have a radar/ visual/ photographic UFO sighting and, so far as I know, that is unique in the annals of ufology, at least as far as the civilian population is concerned.

"Whether the military may have something hidden away, that is better, I don't know."

So, what did we see? Were those objects extraterrestrial craft, time-travellers, visitors from another dimension, or some equally exotic phenomena? It would be nice if I could provide the answer, but unfortunately I cannot. It is not my intention here to enter into a wider discussion about the possible origin (or origins) of the UFO phenomenon. I will leave that to those who have studied and researched the subject over many years. The fact that I was involved in a UFO sighting does not give me any particular insight into the phenomenon. I will, however, attempt to explain my "feelings" about the strange lights off the New Zealand coast during the early morning of 31 December 1978.

I should point out that before this incident my interest in UFOs was peripheral and like most people I believed the term UFO was synonymous with extraterrestrial visitors. That is hardly surprising, considering that most books and articles on the subject lean very heavily towards the outer space connection. But in regard to the New Zealand sightings, the extraterrestrial theory has never sat very comfortably with me. It simply does not feel right. When I looked out of the Argosy window, I did not believe that I was looking at a spacecraft in the conventional sense, i.e. nuts and bolts. And in searching back through the many interviews I gave in the first few days following the sightings I cannot find mention, on my part, of a belief that we had encountered visitors from space. Equally, I did not believe we had encountered anything conventional. To me the lights had a hypnotic quality, an almost spiritual feel about them. In fact, I recall saying exactly that when I was interviewed for a Channel O documentary the day after the sightings. I also mentioned that I did not mean spiritual in any religious sense. It was more a feeling that the objects were something other than a physical reality. It was only later that I was to learn that other people had reported an apparent psychic aspect to the UFO phenomenon.

No doubt there are some who will attempt to argue away my "psychic feelings" as no more than an overwrought, over-stimulated mind trying to come to terms with the fear and excitement of the moment. Whatever the case, I did experience something psychic, be it real or imagined. Perhaps my feelings are best summed up in an interview I gave in December 1979 to Bill

Chalker, editor of a magazine put out by the New South Wales UFO Research group. (Key: F, Quentin Fogarty; C, Bill Chalker.)

F: I was on the right-hand side as we turned back on course [after turning towards the target north of Christchurch]. Dennis [Grant] was behind Bill [Startup] on the left. I was further back as David was in the front filming. I was out of Dennis's line of sight and I felt this strange vulnerability. I looked behind me. The lights were out on the plane and we looked behind us, Dennis and myself. We didn't say anything. I had this dreadful feeling of something in the plane. Dennis felt it too. It felt like a warning. Maybe it was just a psychological feeling. I had the feeling, especially on the return leg that we were being allowed to film. I was not thinking of spacemen, or extraterrestrials, or anything.

C: It was just completely foreign?

F: Yes. To me it was just that they were some sort of intelligence of their own, not having occupants or anything. Whatever they were, that was the entire thing. I didn't have a feeling of anything inside them. It gets a little weird and wacky. I had another feeling at the time, which I have not written about, like they were collecting the souls of the dead. I can't explain this feeling. They were far more psychic than anything. I felt that there was something incredibly spiritual and emotional about it all, but I could not come to terms with it, I couldn't work out what it was. Through the whole thing I cannot be convinced about an extraterrestrial origin, because it doesn't feel right, for no other reason.

Finally, I would like to re-state some of the characteristics of the objects, with special emphasis on how they appeared to me at the time.

Journey south

For the most part, the lights started as pinpoints and then quickly pulsated into brilliant globes, mainly yellowish white, with tinges of orange and red. The first lights sighted from the aircraft appeared in a line in the direction of Kaikoura. They were definitely airborne and the sighting line stayed towards Kaikoura as the aircraft moved down the coast. Sometimes there were two or three in a row, then several more would pulsate into view. As far as I can recall they were never uniform in their appearance – they seemed to grow and shrink in a random manner while retaining their brilliance right down to their

smallest size. They were much brighter than the lights of Kaikoura, other ground lights, and also any astronomical body. At one stage they lit up the ground or water beneath them. Another of the objects, which was observed to the right of the aircraft, gave off a very bright white and green light and stayed with the aircraft for several minutes.

For the remainder of the trip south, the lights were similar in appearance to those we first sighted in the direction of Kaikoura. I believe that all the unusual lights observed on the journey south were seen to the front and right of the aircraft.

Journey north

The light source filmed on the first part of the journey north was yellow-white in colour but did not have the same definite "edge" and shape of the objects observed on the flight to Christchurch. The other main difference was the fact that it did not grow or shrink in size. To those of us on board the Argosy, the object remained a steady ball of light, much brighter than any other body in the brilliant starlit sky. The object also appeared to pace the aircraft and this is borne out by Maccabee's investigation. Maccabee also believes the object retreated from the aircraft as the Argosy turned towards it during Bill Startup's little test. This would tend to suggest that the object was under some form of control.

The unusual lights observed during the remainder of the journey were, for the most part, very similar to the pulsating lights seen on the southward leg. Again, they started as pinpoints and expanded into large balls of light with a definite spherical shape.

One of the most unusual incidents of the entire night occurred as we headed back towards the coast after the turn south-east. Two pulsating lights suddenly appeared high in the sky. Incredibly, one dropped, leaving a trail of light, and settled into a rolling and turning pattern among a number of other lights. At the time, I made this comment on tape: "It appears to be over the hills … there appears to be a whole cluster of them in fact. You can see the orange and the red among the lights. There's one particular one that keeps flashing to the right-hand side of … you can see three distinct lights. In fact, it looks very much like the pattern we saw when we came down over the Kaikoura coast on the way down, but there wasn't quite as much flashing. It

really is quite strange."

The single most brilliant display, for me personally, was the light that appeared as the plane was approaching Cape Campbell. Again, it was yellowish white in colour but it had a far more pronounced red tinge than the other lights we had seen. It was so high in the sky that I had to crouch down to get a good look at it. That was the last unusual light we saw, and it was a spectacular finale.

The sightings off the New Zealand coast did not end with our touchdown at Blenheim airport on the morning of 31 December. Early in 1979, I was told by David Crockett that soon after our encounter the radar activity had shifted to Kapiti Island, a bleak, windswept bird sanctuary that hugs the lower south-west coast of the North Island. Captain Bill Startup told me about other sightings during an after-dinner chat at my Melbourne home just before Christmas, 1980. Later I wrote to him for further details and he told me that although there had been further sightings, there had been "nothing like the performance of December 1978." According to Startup, most of the sightings had occurred in the Clarence-Kaikoura area and had involved his fellow pilots from Safe Air. Occasionally, he said, there had also been radar sightings. He said that two of the sightings involving aircrews had occurred near airports, one at Wellington in mid-1980 and the other at Auckland. The Auckland incident had involved a Safe Air crew and, according to Startup, the event had also been seen from the nearby control tower. So, in spite of the New Zealand government's loud protestation that nothing untoward has, or is, occurring in New Zealand's skies, the evidence points to the contrary.

*FOOTNOTE: Pilots employed by Ansett Airlines, one of Australia's two major domestic airlines.

Chapter 20: Reflections 2014

As part of my re-reading and revision of this book, prior to epublishing, I thought it made sense to reflect again on my encounter, 35 years later. I still regard my involvement in this story as one of the most significant events in my life. It takes very little effort for my mind to transport me back onto the flight deck of the Argosy and to recall the amazing light show taking place in the night sky.

The Kaikoura sightings are still regarded as one of the most compelling UFO events of recent times. In 2008 I was flown to New York by NBC to take part in a Dateline program that rated the sightings as one of the world's top 10 UFO encounters.

Unfortunately, I am still frustrated that after all this time we are no closer to a definitive answer as to what we saw and filmed. Dr Bruce Maccabee continued to investigate the case and, as he explained in an email to me early in 2013, *" I did a mountain of work after the press conference, some of which appeared in your book."*

He said important research included:

1) Analysis of radar-visual during the flight south when "your target has doubled in size" and you looked out the right side and saw a light

2) Proof that the very bright object seen to the right as you left Christchurch was not a squid boat

3) Analysis of the flashing light as you approached the north-east coast of the South Island. These are treated in extant at my web site.

Soon after this response from Maccabee, he sent me another email:

"One could invest some more time and money in studying the film but for a diminished return. That is, with great effort, one might find some previously unknown bit of information, but it would probably not be a show stopper.

"The big thing is to get some sort of confirmation that at least some of the

lights and radar targets absolutely cannot be explained. I think that has been done as the core of the 'follow on' investigation.

"As for the 'animal, vegetable or mineral' comment mentioned at the press conference, I see no way that the available data would answer this question.

"The data could indicate that intelligence was involved (OI — Other Intelligence).

"For example: the event when flying south when the radar target 'doubled in size' and stayed that way while you looked out the window and saw a light apparently traveling with the airplane, and the associated radar targets before and after — no natural phenomenon could account for this and there were no other aircraft, hence could be (probably is) evidence of OI.

"It would be nice if modern analysis could deduce the actual shape of the object seen out of Christchurch. The best chance for this would have been in the movie frames as the 240mm lens went through focus as Crockett 'zoomed in' (it was not correctly mounted on the camera). Unfortunately the light was so bright it overexposed the film and thus obliterated any of the fine details of shape.

"You can see some details of shape of the flashing light when it dims way down and you see a pale yellow/orange 'dot' of light above two side-by-side red dots. What this means I do not know, but I do know that there was no known light that could appear as this triangular shape.

"You can point out that the Christchurch light that has been called a squid boat is STILL the only UFO sighting to be 'argued out' in the refereed technical literature."

Maccabee's conclusion that "Other Intelligence" was probably involved in the sightings is exciting but again not definitive. His other comments that further investigation of the footage would probably not find any "show stopper" information would strongly suggest there is not much further we can take this story at this time.

Speaking of the footage, there is an interesting sidebar. Several years ago, an executive from Channel 10 told me he was discussing with his colleagues the idea that the channel should simply turn the footage over to me. It had been locked in a safe for more than 30 years and the channel had made almost nothing out of it. This could be attributed to the ridiculously high price tag

they quoted any time anyone approached them for the broadcast rights. Anyway, when the talk got around to maybe turning over the film and the rights to me, the executive asked the channel's chief cameraman to check on the footage to make sure it was still in good condition. Much to his surprise, he discovered that the footage in the channel's safe was a copy. The original was missing. For three decades the channel had been sitting on the footage, believing it was a valuable commodity, when in fact the original had long gone. So where did it go?

Several years after the sightings, Leonard Lee wrote a fictional account of the events surrounding the encounter. I am not sure if the manuscript was ever published as a book (I certainly can find no record of it), but I did read part of it. I was a character in the book, albeit under another name, as was Lee. In the manuscript Lee's character described removing the original footage from then safe and substituting it with a copy. Given that in real life Lee had been "granted exclusive rights" to the footage, as described in the previous chapter, it would not be surprising that at some stage he had possession of the original footage. Whether Lee returned the footage and someone else substituted it for a copy, I do not know and Channel 10 does not seem interested in taking the matter any further. That aside, Lee's continuing fascination, one might say his obsession, with the Kaikoura sightings, is obvious in an article in *The New Zealand Herald*, 'Lights in sky haunt TV producer for three decades," dated 30 December 2008. It reads, in part:

*"I still hold ambitions that one day the complete story will be told. This was reinforced during a visit to Renwick last week, where producer *Paul Davidson has the decommissioned old Argosy Safe Air freighter — the Merchant Enterprise — on show on his front lawn next to the main highway to Nelson. I spent a lot of time looking out at that old, historic aircraft, reliving the extraordinary events of December 30, 1979.*

"During my time there I had the pleasure of meeting Captain Bill Startup for the first time and reading his book The Kaikoura UFOs. *It wasn't until I read his book that I realised how courageous the witnesses had been on that night. Not only did they fly south from Wellington to Christchurch, they then flew back through the UFOs to Blenheim. I would have jumped off in Christchurch and bloody stayed there. For 30 years I have lived almost every day with this story. The trouble is that no story can ever match it."*

Although I too would love to see the final chapter of this story written, I am not confident this will happen. As Maccabee has stated, the film is unlikely to produce any further “show-stopping” revelations and quite frankly, after 35 years, I doubt that anyone will finance any further investigation. However, that does not lessen my desire to find an explanation, mundane or otherwise. At this moment, I still do not believe there is any conclusive evidence of an extraterrestrial origin for the objects we observed. Maccabee’s strong suggestion of “Other Intelligence” does not prove the objects were travellers from an alien civilisation — but it opens up some tantalising possibilities. Even if these objects behaved in a manner that defied mundane explanation, why should this necessarily mean they are of alien origin? There is so much we do not know about this natural world of ours and I suspect the explanations for these sightings, and so many other UFO encounters, may lie just outside our realm of present understanding.

I am still approached by people who want to talk about UFOs, although less frequently. I think they see me as someone who will be sympathetic to their cause. Almost without exception, they are not interested in the details of my encounter; they simply want me to affirm their existing belief in extraterrestrials. Invariably there will be a little bit of small talk about what I experienced, but they will quickly move on to their own belief systems. Some will tell me that they too have had a mysterious encounter and that they strongly believe in extraterrestrials. I usually explain that I too believe in the high possibility of life elsewhere in the universe, but that my case is not proof of an extraterrestrial visitation. This both confuses and frustrates them. They don’t want to hear that the famous Kaikoura sightings might not be evidence of alien visitors. I have sensed on occasions that they regard me as a bit of a “traitor,” someone who cashed in on the UFO phenomenon but who now has doubts.

For the record, let me state here that I firmly believe no mundane explanation has been found for the Kaikoura sightings and, in fact, there are many mysterious, even disturbing, aspects that continue to defy explanation. But, in the absence of physical evidence (i.e. material from a spacecraft, or a spacecraft itself; or an alien being, dead or alive), it would be mischievous, even unethical, to say the Kaikoura sightings were the result of a visit from intelligent beings from another galaxy or dimension.

The dilemma for all of us involved in this case is the use of the term unidentified flying object, or UFO. You cannot use these words, or the acronym, without acknowledging the baggage and the sub-text that comes with their use. Simply put, an unidentified flying object is almost universally used to describe or infer that the object is an alien spacecraft. I argued consistently over the years that I could use the descriptor without having to buy into the extraterrestrial sub-text. I was happy to go along with NICAP's conclusion that we had filmed a genuine unidentified object (which, in the United States at least, carried the strong inference that it was extraterrestrial in origin); and I was happy to use the findings of Dr Maccabee and his colleagues to strengthen the case for the Kaikoura sightings to be regarded as something out of the ordinary. Because of the way the story was framed from the start, it could not escape its UFO tag and the extraterrestrial sub-text.

With hindsight, a more appropriate term to describe the Kaikoura sightings, and many other so-called UFO cases, would be UAP, or unexplained aerial phenomena. But that was not a term that had much, or any currency, back in 1978. You also have to take into account the prevailing social climate at the time. The earlier sightings on 21 December involved highly respected professionals – flights crews and radar operators — and were widely reported in the media as encounters with UFOs. That was why I was asked to do the story in the first place. We simply set out to get some night-time flying footage so that we had the appropriate visuals to produce a good television news story. The fact that we stumbled into our own UFO encounter was obviously a bonus, from my perspective as a TV journalist, but it was totally unplanned and unexpected. However, once it happened, we were locked into a 'UFO' encounter and that was the way we reported the story. A short time later Dr Maccabee's findings and NICAP's endorsement elevated the story into UFO folklore.

With hindsight, would I take the same approach today if a similar opportunity presented itself? No, I would not. I have never used the term extraterrestrial to describe the sightings, although you could argue that I did so, by default, by using the UFO label. But I was never convinced that we had encountered alien spacecraft. I was, and I still am, in awe of what we observed. The light show was extraordinary. It had a profound effect on me at the time and continues to do so even now three decades later. As I explained in the

previous chapter, *Reflections 1982*, I felt that the lights had some sort of intelligence of their own. Whatever they were, that was the entire thing. I didn't have a feeling of anything inside them. In other words, I did not believe we were looking at craft with occupants. That was how I felt back then and it is how I feel today. Of course, this is subjective reasoning without a shred of proof. I simply re-state it for the record.

Until now, that is about as far as I have been prepared to go in offering an "explanation." However, re-publishing "*Lets Hope They're Friendly*" as an e-book got me thinking; maybe I should explore this a little further? After all, as a major participant and possessing an inquiring mind – hopefully fine-tuned by a lifetime as a journalist and communicator – my opinion is as valid as anyone's. The constant for me, from the outset, has been this feeling that the lights we observed, especially on the journey south and during the final part of the journey north, were self-contained. I recall telling a journalist in the days after the sightings that the objects seemed to be "in their element … it was as though we had stumbled into a UFO playground." This was especially true when we first observed the lights. They were simply stunning as they lit up the night sky. Whether they were turning on this display for our benefit, or simply having fun, I have no idea.

Recently I read an article by Diane Tessman at www.ufocasebook.com, titled "Plasma, 4th State of Matter: Is There Intelligent Life Dwelling Within?" She starts her article with this statement:

"After many years of being involved in UFOlogy, I have concluded that some UFOs are intricately connected to plasma … in many sightings, the UFOs have a plasma-like appearance."

When I read that I was immediately reminded of a conversation with Dr Richard Haines in the backyard of his home in Los Altos, California, in 1980. Dr Haines was one of the scientists who collaborated with Dr Maccabee to investigate the Kaikoura sightings. His speciality at the time was investigating aerial UFO encounters. He told me that some of these UFOs had actually collided with aircraft, causing denting, but luckily not causing the planes to crash. He hypothesised that some of these unexplained objects might be a form of intelligent atmospheric plasma.

Recently I got in touch with Haines again to discuss the plasma hypothesis,

among other things. He replied, whatever they are at their core UAP are multidimensional.

"I say this for one of several reasons because of their reported ability to appear and disappear virtually instantaneously during both night and daylight viewing conditions.

"Such disappearance and reappearance is not the result of some kind of physiological scotomata (retinal blindness)! All that is required for something to disappear from human eyesight is for its emitted/reflected light to go beyond the spectral range of our eyes.

"Whether some UAP possess (or are linked remotely to) intelligence is a catch 22 assertion. If UAP are some kind of natural phenomenon (like ball lightning) then one would not expect them to respond in any systematic way to human signalling or other overt behaviors. If they are controlled intelligently on the other hand, there is a greater likelihood that their responses will mimic or signal what the human did first."

Haines referred to his book, *Close Encounters of the Fifth Kind (CE-5)*, which was published in 1999. He said his book presented over 240 cases worldwide which strongly suggested the second conclusion – that UAPs are <u>controlled intelligently</u>.

"I am a bit surprised that so few people know about this work and its striking implications. The implications are awesome for all mankind. To me one of the great mysteries of our age is how and why our government officials continue to ignore the subject. If you want to write about that you would be doing a great service.

"Additionally, what if UAP are nothing more than God's fulfilment of the prophecy from Jesus through Luke (e.g., chpt. 21: verse 11)? I certainly must leave this door ajar as I research the physical aspects of it."

I thank Dr Haines for his comments, which bring me back to the article by Diane Tessman. She poses the question, 'Is there intelligent life within plasma formations?' She asks whether UFO beings might be a life form within plasma, or just simply a plasma form of life?

"If they are a plasma form of life, we tend to assume they are primitive life, like an amoeba, or perhaps a jellyfish? Of course there have been many 'jellyfish' and 'mantra ray' sightings throughout the years, which seem to be

animals of some sort 'swimming' in the sky. Often these critters have plasma-like electric colours. Are they plasmoids?"

Putting aside "jellyfish, mantra rays and critters" just for a moment, I am intrigued with the questions raised by Diane Tessman. The suggestion that we might have encountered plasmoids, intelligent or otherwise, sits comfortably with me as a possible explanation for the lights sources we observed on the journey south, and towards the end of the journey north. I find that just as exciting and plausible as speculating that they were extraterrestrial. Imagine that – intelligent plasma, living in our atmosphere!!!

The main object we observed and filmed on the journey out of Christchurch does not fit so easily into this hypothesis. It did not exhibit the same characteristics as the other lights. It was observed for much longer and it did not grow or shrink in size. It was also yellow-white in colour, whereas the other lights had strong hues of red and orange. Whether it was a different form of plasma, or something quite different all together, I have no idea.

This story has enjoyed a life cycle of more than 30 years and continues to intrigue and frustrate those involved. I, for one, continue to have an open and inquisitive mind. I have used the re-publishing of this book to speculate about a possible explanation for some of the lights. After an exhaustive scientific investigation, Dr Maccabee has totally discounted any conventional explanation and suggests strongly that "Other Intelligence" was involved. The nature of that intelligence is the final intriguing piece in the Kaikoura Lights puzzle.

Sadly, Network Ten has never shown any interest in taking this story further and commissioning additional scientific testing. On the 30th anniversary of the sightings, I proposed that I produce a documentary for them to mark the event and suggested that the program could include some further analysis. But they were not interested. Even more embarrassing, they then discovered they had "lost" the original footage. Any reputable testing agency would want access to the original film, not the copy that was left in the safe at the network's Melbourne headquarters. So, there is no way the network will take the lead in any further investigation and unless a major financial backer comes forward, and the original film resurfaces, the final chapter in this story will remain unwritten.

*FOOTNOTE: Paul Davidson purchased the Argosy aircraft that was involved in the 31 December

sightings and located it adjacent to Woodbourne airfield as part of the Argosy Museum and Café.

Appendix A:

The Valentich Story

NOTE: No story on UFOs in the Southern Hemisphere would be complete without mentioning the mysterious disappearance of Frederick Valentich. Also, as I pointed out earlier, it was the tremendous interest in this case that eventually led to my own encounter. In turn, my experiences and the film reinforced the Valentich family's belief that Frederick had been taken by a UFO and might still be alive.

The Valentich story began at 6.20 pm on 21 October 1978 when the 21-year-old pilot took off from Melbourne's Moorabbin Airport in a single-engine Cessna 182, ostensibly to fly to King Island in Bass Strait to pick up some lobster and also to gain some night-time flying experience. Forty-seven minutes after take-off, at 7.06 pm, when the aircraft was apparently over Bass Strait, Valentich called up Melbourne Flight Service.

V (Valentich): Melbourne, this is Delta Sierra Juliet. Is there any know traffic below 5000 feet?

G (Ground): No known traffic.

V: Delta Sierra Juliet. I am ... seems to be large aircraft below 5000.

7.06 pm and 44 seconds:

G: Delta Sierra Juliet, what type of aircraft is it?

V: Delta Sierra Juliet. I cannot confirm. It has four bright, it seems to me, like landing lights.

7.07 pm:
G: Delta Sierra Juliet.

7.07 pm and 31 seconds:

V: Melbourne, this is Delta Sierra Juliet. The aircraft just passed over me at least a thousand feet above.

G: Roger. And it is a large aircraft? Confirmed?

V: Unknown due to speed it’s travelling. Is there any air force aircraft in the vicinity?

G: Delta Sierra Juliet, no known aircraft in vicinity.

7.08 pm and 18 seconds:

V: Melbourne, it's approaching now from due east towards me.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet.

7.08 pm and 41 seconds:

(Open microphone for two seconds).

7.08 pm and 48 seconds:

V: Delta Sierra Juliet. It seems to me that it’s flying over me, two to three times at speeds I cannot identify.

7.09 pm:

G: Roger. What is your actual level?

V: My level is four and a half thousand. Four, five, zero, zero.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet, and you confirm you cannot identify aircraft?

V: Affirmative.

G: Roger. Stand by.

7.09 pm and 27 seconds:

V: Melbourne, Delta Sierra Juliet. It’s not an aircraft. It’s ... (Open mike for two seconds).

7.09 pm and 42 seconds:

G: Delta Sierra Juliet, Melbourne. Can you describe aircraft?

V: Delta Sierra Juliet. As it’s flying past it’s a long shape. (Open mike for three seconds). Cannot identify more than that. It has such speed ... (Open mike for three seconds). Before me right now, Melbourne.

7.10 pm:
G: Roger, and how large would object be?

7.10 pm and 19 seconds:

V: Delta Sierra Juliet, Melbourne. Seems like it's stationary. What I'm doing right now is orbiting and the thing is just orbiting on top of me also. It's got a green light and a sort of metallic light. It's all shiny on the outside.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet.

7.10 pm and 46 seconds:

V: Delta Sierra Juliet. (Open mike for five seconds). It’s just vanished.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet.

7.11 pm:

V: Melbourne, would you know what type of aircraft I've got? Is it a military aircraft?

G: Delta Sierra Juliet. Confirm aircraft just vanished.

V: Say again?

G: Is aircraft still with you?

V: It's ... (open mike for two seconds now approaching from south-west.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet.

7.11 pm and 50 seconds:

V: Delta Sierra Juliet. The engine is rough idling. I've got it set at 23, 24 and the thing is coughing.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet, roger. What are your intentions?

V: My intentions are to continue on to King Island. Melbourne, that strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again. It ... (open mike for two seconds) is hovering and it's not an aircraft.

G: Delta Sierra Juliet.

7.12 pm and 28 seconds:

V: Delta Sierra Juliet, Melbourne ... (The mike then remained open for 17 seconds during which a loud metallic sound was heard).

Although the Federal Department of Transport (since renamed Transport Australia), which is the official air accident investigating body in Australia, released the transcript of the conversation, they would not release the tape itself for media scrutiny. According to the department, they felt their investigators could come up with better conclusions than the press. At the time of writing, the official file on Valentich's disappearance remained open, although the authorities would not comment on the possibility that a UFO might have been responsible. Soon after the incident, a department spokesman said it was possible that Valentich became disoriented by beams from two lighthouses reflecting on clouds, that he was flying upside down, and finally crashed into the sea. What the spokesman conveniently forgot to mention was the fact that if the plane had been upside down for more than 30 seconds, the engine would have been starved of oil and would have cut out. Also, it seems fairly far-fetched to imagine that Valentich was able to carry on a coherent conversation with a flight service officer while he was flying upside down.

One person who has heard that fateful taped conversation is Frederick's father, Guido: "I really think that from what he described on the radio," Guido told me, "he must have met something very mysterious. It definitely was a craft, an object, something very big. Because of its size, there must have been intelligent life on board, or maybe it was radio-controlled."

I asked Guido how his son had sounded during the conversation with Melbourne Flight Service. Did he sound upset? Was he excited?

"It was a normal sort of transmission," he said, "much the same as when I'd flown with him. There was no confusion, no nervousness. It was very quiet, until the last 10 seconds."

As further evidence to back the theory that Frederick and his aircraft were taken by some unknown force, or object, Guido pointed out that in spite of a wide search by aircraft using sophisticated detection equipment, no wreckage was found. He said experts had told him that if the plane had gone into the sea there would have been some evidence on the surface. When I spoke to

Guido, he and his family still believed that Frederick was alive, although they were not holding out too much hope for his eventual return.

“So far,” said Guido, “I haven’t met anyone who has returned, although there’s been a lot of talk about people being taken and returning. However, no one has proved to me that anyone has come back.”

Naturally there was much speculation about Valentich’s disappearance. I heard one suggestion that he had staged an incredible hoax and that one day he would appear, announce that his alien abductors had returned him to earth, and then would proceed to make a fortune by selling his story. There were also rumours that he had stage-managed his own disappearance because of personal or financial problems, and even that he was engaged in drug running. Guido scoffs at all these theories. He told me that Frederick was a happy young man and was pleased with the way his flying career was going. He said that if Frederick had had any serious personal problems, he was certain he would have discussed them with himself, or his wife.

A few days after the incident there were press reports quoting Valentich’s girl friend, Rhonda Rushton, as saying that she felt he was still alive and that she knew where he was. The centre of attention then swung to Apollo Bay, a small town on the southern Victorian coast. According to the reports, Miss Rushton went to a motel in the area and asked to see Valentich. When she was told he was not there, she reportedly stood there in disbelief, as if she did not want to leave. There were other newspaper reports, in complete contradiction, and for a time the situation became very confused. Knowing the way I had been misquoted by the press after my experiences, I do not place much credence in any of those reports.

Most strong UFO cases invariably bring a flood of sightings and the Valentich incident was no exception. The case attracted wide publicity and in the days that followed there were hundreds of reported sightings, with some people claiming they had seen strange things in the sky on the same day and in the same area as the Bass Strait incident. One man who came forward also claimed that he had taken a number of photographs looking out over Bass Strait about 20 minutes before Valentich reported his encounter. Later, when the film was processed, a number of the negatives showed a UFO-like object. One of the photos was published early in January 1979 and was promptly dismissed by the Royal Australian Air Force as a “disintegrating cumulus

cloud."

But that was not the end of the matter. The man who took the photographs agreed to allow the negatives to be taken to the United States for computer analysis and late in May 1979 there were newspaper reports to say that the analysis indicated a solid, probably metallic, object. The study of the negatives was carried out by Ground Saucer Watch in Arizona and their conclusion was that the images represented a bona fide unknown flying object, apparently surrounded by a cloud-like, vapour-exhaust residue. The analysis put the size of the object at approximately six metres across.

There is another aspect of the Valentich story that is worth mentioning. A number of people, claiming to be psychics, came forward with their own particular theories on the case. One, from New Zealand, claimed that Valentich had been captured by "ufonauts" and was being held at their base below the waters of Bass Strait. Another self-proclaimed psychic, this time from the United States, visited Melbourne and spent some time with Guido. In a telephone conversation with me, this gentleman said he was certain that Valentich had been taken by a UFO. He also said he wanted to visit me to talk about the New Zealand sightings, but I declined. I had suffered enough from my involvement in the UFO phenomenon and I had no wish to become embroiled in the controversial world of psychics. But early in 1980 I did become involved.

I was at home, typing and listening to the radio, when the announcer mentioned that he had Professor J. Allen Hynek on the phone from Chicago. It was an interview about UFOs in general, with particular mention of the Valentich case. Later in the day I spoke to a contact at the radio station and he mentioned that Hynek was interested in having some personal items of Frederick Valentich sent to a woman in the US who claimed she had psychic powers. Evidently the woman felt she could help to solve the mystery surrounding the young pilot's disappearance. I told my contact that I would get in touch with Guido and see what I could do. First I wrote to Hynek to seek more information about the alleged psychic. I did not think it would be fair to involve the Valentich family unless I was satisfied the woman, and her motives, were genuine.

Early in March, Hynek replied and enclosed some press clippings on the woman, Pat Gagliardo, from Norwich in Connecticut. The press reports dealt

with the discovery of the body of Richard E. Eastman, a US Coast Guard electronics expert who went missing after leaving a club in New London, Connecticut, on the morning of 3 April 1979. According to the reports, Mrs Gagliardo led investigators from the New London County State Attorney's Office to a spot in the Thames River where they found Eastman's body in a sunken car. That was seven months after he disappeared. The newspaper reports said it took Mrs Gagliardo several days of meditation, using the dead man's credit card (supplied to her by the investigators) to establish a number of strong mental images – water, a dock, a car, a piece of rope, a barge and crane floating offshore, and a nearby seaplane. She also perceived an image of a man she claimed was Eastman. Finally, the mental puzzle complete, she accompanied investigators along the banks of the Thames River. According to the press reports, when she was led to City Pier, New London, she felt "uncontrollable vibrations." Apparently, at the time of Eastman's disappearance the river was being dredged and a barge, with a crane, was moored off City Pier. The reports said the area was also frequently used to moor seaplanes. Although she encountered some initial scepticism from the investigators, Mrs Gagliardo convinced them to search the river off the pier and they located Eastman's car with his badly decomposed body inside.

Evidently, Mrs Gagliardo's apparent abilities had impressed both Hynek and Allan Hendry, chief investigator for the Center for UFO Studies, a man respected by sceptics and proponents alike for his critical and impartial approach to the UFO phenomenon.

"We have had occasion to test this psychic with material she could not have possibly known," wrote Hynek, "and she came through with flying colours."

On the strength of that recommendation and the press reports, Guido decided to send some of his son's personal effects, including a metal compass, to Mrs Gagliardo in the hope that she might be able to throw some light on the mystery surrounding Frederick's disappearance.

It was three months before I heard from Hynek again and he had, as he put it, some disturbing news. After handling the personal effects sent by Guido, Mrs Gagliardo did not feel any "alien contact," nor did she receive any impressions of the plane being in water.

"I felt that Fred Valentich had planned this episode," she said. "My feeling

was that the plane had safely landed on land and has been camouflaged.

"I feel it is in an area not far from the water's edge. It is between a grove of large trees with pastures on the east and west. My impressions lie mostly with King Island and Tasmania."

In other words, Mrs Gagliardo was suggesting that Frederick was alive and well and living in Tasmania. She said that she might be able to obtain a more accurate location for the plane if she were to handle a more personal item, like a piece of jewellery.

Although I had not yet to be convinced of Mrs Gagliardo's alleged powers, I was intrigued by the way the story was developing. Just imagine, I thought, if the plane was located with the help of a psychic. That would certainly upset the world of the professional sceptic and debunker. On the one hand, they would crow about the fact that a UFO was not involved, but they would then be faced with a dilemma – how to explain the involvement of a psychic in the case. I had already planned a three-week trip to the United States in July, so I decided to approach Guido for some more personal effects and to deliver them personally to Mrs Gagliardo.

I met Pat Gagliardo at her home in Norwich on 8 July 1980 and gave her a number of Frederick's items, including a tie, a pen, a badge and a steering wheel cover. I also took two maps with me, one of King Island and the other of Tasmania. I thought they might help Mrs Gagliardo to pinpoint the exact location of the plane. It was quite an amazing meeting. She told me things that she could not possibly have known and which I later confirmed on my return to Australia. At one stage we were discussing the layout of Frederick's room in the Valentich family home in Melbourne. I had been in the room once before, in January 1979, and I could vaguely remember some of the details. Mrs Gagliardo asked me if there was a map in the room, a map with red lines drawn on it. I could recall seeing something resembling a map but I could not be definite. I suggested that maybe it was a globe of the world and I had a mental image of a globe on top of a wardrobe. But she was adamant it was a map and she placed it near a small bedside table. Later, on my return to Australia, I met with Guido and we spoke about the map. To my astonishment, Guido confirmed there was a small globe in Frederick's room but, more importantly, he said the formica top of the bedside table portrayed a map of the world! Mrs Gagliardo also asked me to find out if there had

been a marked change in Frederick's moods in the three days leading up to his disappearance. When I mentioned this to Guido he seemed quite surprised that I had asked. He told me that Frederick was normally grumpy in the mornings but on the morning of his disappearance he was a very happy young man, smiling and joking. Guido was so taken by this change that he remarked on it to his wife.

Throughout my meeting with Mrs Gagliardo, she handled the personal effects of the missing pilot and on one occasion went into the bedroom by herself and tried to mentally retrace the route taken by the Cessna aircraft after it left Moorabbin airport. Initially I did not show her the maps I had brought with me but left her to sketch the route she thought the plane had taken. The map she produced was fairly rough and showed two land masses, separated by a large amount of water and a land mass further south. By stretching one's imagination, it was possible to see a rough resemblance to Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay that leads into Bass Strait. The land mass to the south could have been Tasmania. But it was the placing of a small group of islands off the north-west corner of the land mass to the south that intrigued me. I compared her rough sketch with my own map and there was a definite resemblance between the three shapes she had drawn and the three main islands that sit just off the Tasmanian coast. She could of course have studied a map of the area prior to my arrival, although she claimed she was not familiar with the geographical features of the area. On my map she ringed the area of Smithton and said that the nearby township of Montagu would be a good starting point in any search for the missing pilot and his aircraft. Later, when I sent her a more detailed map of the area she narrowed down the possible landing site further to the west, near a rough landing strip on a property known as Woolnorth Station. She also drew a possible land route that would have taken Frederick through Montagu.

She also told me that the plane had recently undergone an overhaul and she thought that the door panel might have been damaged in some way. Later Guido confirmed that the plane had been overhauled shortly before 21 October and, although the interior was not in the best of condition (ripped door panel?), the plane was mechanically sound.

There are a number of other interesting aspects to the story. For instance, Guido told me that a short time after Frederick's disappearance, Rhonda

Rushton asked him to fly with her to Burnie, a town on the north-west coast of Tasmania, so that they could search for Frederick. Guido said she had even contacted one of Frederick's friends in an attempt to hire a pilot to fly them over the area. But Guido was against the flight and it did not take place. He did not believe there was any ulterior motive for Rhonda's wish to go to Tasmania. He said that at the time she was very upset by Frederick's disappearance and felt that he might have strayed off course and landed elsewhere, maybe on one of the islands off the north-west coast of Tasmania.

The Tasmanian connection persisted. Guido told me that his wife overheard two women in a store talking about "that young pilot who went missing over Bass Strait." According to Mrs Valentich, one of the women said there had been a rumour that Frederick had been seen working at a service station in Tasmania. When I mentioned this in a letter to Pat Gagliardo, she told me that a week before my letter arrived she had "felt" a service station, with a road nearby, which was either being constructed or undergoing major repairs.

I was now sufficiently impressed to contemplate making a trip to Tasmania to mount a limited search for the plane. But I thought it would be wise to make some further checks. I wrote to Samuel Fandel, the Police Chief of the New London Police Department, and asked him for verification of the role played by Mrs Gagliardo in locating the body of Richard Eastman. I asked him also if he knew of any other incidents where Mrs Gagliardo had used her psychic powers to help the police solve crimes. In a letter dated 4 November 1980, Police Chief Fandel confirmed that the information in the newspaper articles was substantially correct.

"Although police officers are traditionally cynical," he wrote, "it was apparent that the suggestions made by Mrs Gagliardo proved fruitful."

He said he knew of another incident when she offered advice that helped police to locate a plastic bag that had supposedly contained a foetus, or a newborn infant.

"Since the fetus [*sic*] or infant was never found, this alleged crime was never verified. However, it cannot be refuted that she did suggest where 'something' could be located. This incident was not publicised," said Chief Fandel.

"It should be noted for [the] record that I cannot state that her powers

contributed to the ‘solving’ of any crimes, although her assistance has been impressive.”

I, too, was impressed. I felt the evidence was strong enough for a limited search for the aircraft. But the search had to wait several months because I was busy with other, far more important things. I had just started a new job, we were searching for a new home, and Sue was in the advanced stages of a very difficult pregnancy. Samuel John was finally born on 10 November 1980 after keeping his anxious parents waiting for a couple of extra weeks.

Finally, on 4 February 1981, I flew to Tasmania with a good friend, Andrew Flannigan. We booked into a hotel at Smithton, hired a car and began our search. We spent two days in the area checking out place names and looking for land features that Mrs Gagliardo had mentioned, hoping to find something that would lead us to the missing aircraft and Frederick Valentich. Our main objective was to investigate the suggested landing site on Woolnorth Station and, after seeking permission to enter the property, we drove to the farmhouse to speak to one of the overseers. I was anxious to find out whether he, or anyone else on the property, had come across a light plane, or any evidence of a landing about the time Valentich disappeared. The overseer said he knew nothing but he said that if a pilot wanted to land on the property he could easily do so without being spotted. If the plane had been camouflaged, then it would be found only if someone stumbled upon it by chance. I was struck by the fact that the physical features of the area corresponded accurately with what Mrs Gagliardo had told me but I soon realised that it would take an enormous search, involving many people, to cover the huge property.

We left Woolnorth, disappointed that the task was proving too formidable for our limited time and resources. We drove back to Montagu but we could find nothing that substantially corroborated the information supplied by Mrs Gagliardo. She had told me that I should look for a building — either a restaurant, a boarding house or some other type of public building. She said we should find a sign on the building with the word “castle” or “castile” on it; or the building itself would look like a castle. There was no such building. In fact, Montagu has no public buildings as such. It is more a geographical area than an actual township, with a few scattered houses, a store/post office and a couple of churches.

During the two days we were in Tasmania we covered a considerable distance on the north-west coast, even going as far as Burnie, about 88 kilometres east of Smithton. But we found no trace of any building that resembled a castle, or had a “castle” sign. We also found no trace of anything that resembled a “round stone building with many windows,” another clue given to me by Mrs Gagliardo. Just before leaving Burnie I noticed a postcard in a shop window that did show such a building. It was the Wrest Point Casino, located at Hobart, Tasmania’s largest city, more than 400 kilometres south of Burnie. Maybe, I thought at the time, Frederick moved on to Hobart after spending some time in the north-west region? But it soon became obvious that all the links were rather tenuous and there was nothing that we could substantially corroborate. Still, I do not believe the trip was wasted. Mrs Gagliardo came highly recommended and, as evidenced by Police Chief Fandel, her assistance to the New London Police Department had been “impressive.”

As for Guido, he was never particularly impressed with Mrs Gagliardo’s claims since he felt there was absolutely no reason for Frederick to stage his own disappearance. At the time of writing that was where the story stood. No trace of Valentich or his aircraft had been found and, until some concrete evidence turns up, the Valentich family must wait, trying to come to terms with Frederick’s mysterious disappearance.

For their sake, I hope that the final chapter to the story will one day be written and that, whatever the outcome, it will finally bring them some peace and comfort.

Appendix B:

Letters

The following letter, dated 25 January 1979, was written by Robert Lanigan-O'Keeffe and was sent to the station manager, program manager and news director of Channel O, Nunawading, Victoria:

"I wish to propose that the O/10 network produces an Australian version of 'Project UFO' based on the scientific research performed both in this country and overseas in special reference to the New Zealand 'UFO?' The reason for this is that when my Scientific Paper is released, the credibility of both Fogerty [*sic*] and Crockett will be challenged, whilst the gullibility of the O/10 Network News will be obvious to all. It will be in the best interest of the Network that the Network be the medium through which my Report is released as there are several very 'HOT' statements which will embarrass not only the Network, but also your testing body in Washington, NICAP. As an example:

"1. The original film, all of seven minutes in length (according to NICAP) is (according to me) so highly edited to create an effect, of which only a few seconds were actually used (20 seconds)!

"2. NICAP's tests were by use of a microscope which is subject to large errors as human interpretation is required, especially if the wrong magnification is used. A microscope is not as exploritive [*sic*] or as sensitive as line scan analysis techniques using a picture and waveform monitor. On the questions that I put to NICAP through the *SMH* [*Sydney Morning Herald*], suggesting the use of a scanning phot0-densitometer, they quibbled at the $50,000. Locally there are three devices, such as the one found at the University of Wollongong, Department of Physics.

"3. All testing by NICAP has been in colour, dealing with the contact copy of the original film. My testing used a monochrome videotape that forced all the colour signals together, increasing the intrinsic brightness. Needless to say,

the tiny moon appeared on many frames at levels slightly greater than the background noise of the film grain, but always in the same places with respect to the object. The reason for this visibility is that the telecine unit was ‘wound up’ to its most sensitive leaving a noticeable persistence effect for several frames. The image of the small object (five and a half lines) was subsequently bloomed from a minimum of 14 lines when stationary.

“4. NOTE WELL

“The positions of the moon varied! For the film of the small object, the positions were exactly correct for the period of time from 16.00 to 16.30 hours U.T. During this time the phenomena of the natural telescope did occur twice on the film. However, detailed analysis of the larger disc like object with its stripes illustrated the great red spot as well as the moons. On checking these positions with the position found on other parts of the phenomena, the time was more likely 18.00 to 18.45 hrs U.T!. These objects were far more stable than those seen during the phenomena, suggesting a ground based series, filmed from a well supported mount some two hours after the other film and flights.

“5. The image size can easily be produced by a 250 mm lens, with an X6 teleconvertor or barlow with the capability of zoom. The exposure times are well within the reach of most movie cameras as noted in the accompanying photographs. To prove my point, I am using a 4/135 USSR lens on F4 at speeds of 10 sec., 2 sec., 1/10 sec. The film some very old Kodak Plus X. The film was developed in PQ Universal by Ilford and Hypam Rapid Fixer at quoted strengths and time. Likewise were the papers (enlarger specifications quoted on the back). Jupiter is the brightest astronomical object apart from Venus at —2 magnitude, and is consequently very easy to photograph with a normal 250 mm lens. The lens used here in my photographs of the real Jupiter is only 35 mm aperture, and this should be about $1/8^{th}$ of the lens area used to film the New Zealand ‘object.’ No forced development was applied to this film. Forced development means that the photographic emulsion is sensitised after the pictures were taken to allow lesser magnitude objects (greater in astronomy) to become visible. This process only produces noticeable grain if the proper controls are not used. The videotape was clear enough to show this grain, plus the grain in the system of the telecine. This

unit should be looked at as there is three noticeable ‘burn’ marks on your phosphor. The camera can film the moons.

“6. Et cetera, research continues.

“The extra program must be totally unbiased and absolutely truthful showing the news reports, questioning experts from the scientific and photo-metric communities, to be on a quality with ‘Horizon.” It naturally will be up to the audience to accuse the previously mentioned characters of their actions. Fogerty will come up looking like the George Adamski of the 1980s, while the Network will be praised for its honest and unique quality of reporting the factual truth. Although gullible at first, due to the executive staff going off on holidays, the credibility was challenged by the unscrupulous individuals taking advantage of the situation. I have, in my paper ‘Close Encounters (of a distant kind)’ given the network many ways out (copy included). However, the scientific article will be so frank and honest, that it will not, even though it is very tactfully written, asking in this detective story the old question, ‘who dun it?’

“If you are to follow my suggestion and produce an Australian version of the said program, then you will need my help. Any monies that I earn from this program will, in the main, be donated to the Illawarra Astronomical Society for the construction of their observatory. If however you believe that my help is not needed, then you *must* wait for my scientific article before proceeding, as in true form, I am not telling you what I know to be the conclusive proof of the intentional half hoax. If you still go ahead, you will be ‘blowing’ the scientific method used in proper journalistic reporting. There are certain questions which I now believe that the general reporter cannot ask because of the lack of specialised knowledge.

“I have given Channel 10 (Sydney) regular reports to discontinue the misrepresentation, but they have continued with comments like ‘that is what you think’ when informed of point four. The response was predictable. It can only mean that financial gain is more important than honest reporting.

“If no reply is received within a week, (7th February, 1979), I will have no recourse but to take the information elsewhere. A talk will be presented at the WEA Hall, 97 Corrimal Street, Wollongong, on Saturday 10th February. The lecturer, (the public relations office), Mr Wally Anglesea will be talking on

this fascinating detective story. The public and the media are cordially invited. Evidence will be shown, and for your Network, this would be an ideal point to start an interesting program on just how science works on and above a UFO report.

"You will no doubt note a few striking coincidences in my paper to the historical [sic] behaviour of individuals in your news department at the time of writing. These were pointed out to me by Mr Sandilands of the *SMH*. I trust that in the future, the Network keeps up the good work, and that from such a program, the cranks in our community who fake UFO films (for reasons which only they know) will not be so determined in the future, as I am now interested in finding a genuine case. I will not be swayed by photographic evidence as perhaps 'Star Wars' and the like, show only too well how easy it is to fake such. There must be a conclusive encounter of the actual third kind now, although I am not prepared to discredit every sighting, I believe in their (sic) being other life forms somewhere. I also trust that NICAP gets itself a photo-densitometer, and plays with the film properly. I should also point out that NICAP does not have a very creditable reputation, though telexes seen indicate a scientific questioning, answers to my questions do not indicate sufficient research, to a suitable depth."

The following is a letter from Lanigan-O'Keeffe to George Elliott, Radio 2UW, Sydney, and follows a program which featured both Lanigan-O'Keeffe and myself. The letter was attached to a seven-page document that he billed as "pre-release notification" of his scientific paper:

"Hi. Many thanks for your presentation of the UFO story so far. To carry on, this is a letter sent to universities, observatories and research bodies in Australia and overseas. I have illustrated it with diagrams to help explanation. I have reached the deepest part of my research and can now show that the film released is a hoax film. The testing done by NICAP was superficial and cannot be relied on. Points 1, 2 and 13 highlight these facts; all obvious mistakes. On May 1st my scientific paper should be released, with the only conclusion possible. Sir Reginald Ansett has received a similar letter but much less technical. I think he will squash the UFO debate in view of my evidence. But only time will tell. If you wish, I will send you a copy of the scientific paper. This will be further edited to a paper for the UFO research convention in October, and that should be a stir as science meets

speculation."

In November 1979, I wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Australian Press Council, the media watchdog, complaining that I had been unfairly treated and my personal integrity severely questioned through a number of *Herald* articles. I argued that in the interest of fair and responsible journalism, the *Herald* should have put all the facts before the public, namely Lanigan-O'Keeffe's claim that the film was hoaxed. This was the reply from the newspaper's acting news editor, Mr A. Peterson:

"I refer to your letter of November 27, 1979, and Mr Bowman's reply of November 30.

"We are concerned that you should feel that the *Herald*, through its reports about the UFO sightings off New Zealand, has treated you unfairly and questioned your personal integrity. We have closely examined again all that we have published on the subject. In it we can find nothing that would reflect upon your integrity. There is much in the reports to call into question the assumptions of those who saw and photographed the images shown on the O-10 network, but nothing to suggest any hoax or anything beyond the possibility of honest error.

"We have also discussed your letter at length with our reporter Mr Ben Sandilands. We are convinced that he has not withheld from publication any significant publishable information that would throw a more favourable light on your conclusions about what was seen and photographed.

"At the centre of your complaint is the assertion that Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe, who concluded that you had filmed Jupiter, based his findings on the assumption that the film was a hoax. You further allege that Mr Sandilands knows this and refuses to publish it.

"In fact, Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe is not prepared to be quoted as saying that the film was a hoax. In a confidential document, which Mr Sandilands has been shown, he discussed the possible origin of parts of what was shown on the O-10 network, but he will not agree to release this speculation for publication. Even if he did agree, we would be hesitant to publish such speculation. We have no evidence of our own to support it.

"Whatever doubts he may or may not have about the film, Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe does not depart from his initial finding that some of the frames first

televised by O-10 are consistent with the filming of the planet Jupiter on the morning of December 31, 1978. We are assured that there was no assumption of any hoax behind that finding, which has been the central point of the Herald's reports on Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe's work.

"We wait with interest the results of the scientific tests to which the O-10 network has said it will subject the film. If these tests contradict Mr Lanigan-O'Keeffe's findings there will be much interest in them, and we will of course report the outcome.

"I regret that Mr Sandilands should have told you that the Fairfax organisation does not pay much attention to the Press Council. He was mistaken. Although the *Herald* does not take part in any of the council's deliberations or hearings, it treats the council as a significant community organisation. Therefore it reports any findings of consequence."

The Press Council did hold a hearing into my complaints but decided that the matter did not really fall within its jurisdiction and suggested that the issue could be resolved satisfactorily by the *Herald* printing a letter from me explaining my position. I had tried that course of action earlier, but the letter was not published.

Finally, I would like to touch on the point raised by the Herald's Mr Peterson in his letter when he referred to the scientific testing promised by the channel. The film has of course already been subjected to a preliminary analysis and this initial study disproved Lanigan-O'Keeffe's theory and the other conventional explanations put forward.

"I saw a disc up in the air,
a silver disc that wasn't there;
two more weren't there again today,
oh how I wish they'd go away."

Graffito from a lavatory wall, White Sands missile range, New Mexico.